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CHARACTERISTICS FROM THE WRITINGS OF FATHER FABER

Aihil obstat.

THOMAS DAWSON, O.M.I.,

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CHARACTERISTICS

FROM THE

WRITINGS OF FATHER FABER

ARRANGED BY THE

REV. JOHN FITZPATRICK, O.M.I.

AUTHOR OF "EUCHARISTIC ELEVATIONS," "VIRGO PRÆDICANDA," ETC

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ROSE, MY SISTER, AS A SIGN OF LOVE

March 25, 1903



PREFACE

In these pages may be found at last what has been so long a desideratum amongst us, an adequate selection of characteristic passages from those wonderful works on the spiritual life which have made Father Faber so well known and so much loved as a master in Israel.

After a careful examination of all our author's writings, it was decided to make extracts only from his eight great treatises, as being undoubtedly his best and characteristic work. His writings fall naturally into three categories: those he published before his conversion to the Church, those he published during his life as a priest and a great director of souls, and those he left unfinished at his death. From the nature of the case, the first series and the third were both excluded from the scope of this volume; and, even in the second series, the minor productions of his pen, save for a single passage of a page or two, seemed of less value than usual, while so many leaves were still clamouring for inclusion from between the covers of the eight volumes already alluded to.

Nothing need be said at this time of day of that memorable union of the theologian and the poet which is called Father Faber. Indeed, although the several volumes of his

verse were foreign to the purpose of this work, poetry, and poetry of a high order, will be found here in plenty; for "thoughts that glow in words that burn" may be read on almost every page; and, while every thought of his seems to come to us from his head only through his heart, many and many a one, in its sweetness and its strength, will be seen to be not unlike the utterance of a St. Bernard or a St. Francis of Sales.

Two hundred and twenty-four selections have been made. of an average length of about two pages and a half-most of them neither very long nor very short—that is to sav, one out of every five or six pages of the works that have been dealt with; and these have been grouped together in four books. The First Book, under the approximative title, "From Bethlehem to Calvary," treats of the life of our Blessed Lord, and is made up, for the most part, of passages from "Bethlehem," "The Foot of the Cross," and "The Precious Blood." The Second Book-mainly from "The Blessed Sacrament "-sets forth that continuation and extension of the Incarnation which, in the Holy Eucharist, makes our Divine Redeemer our contemporary and our compatriot; and this is called "The Gospel of the Eucharist." The Third Book, which is rather more than half the volume, is entitled "The Warfare of the Christian Life "-thus indicating clearly enough the character of its contents-and is composed of extracts from "The Creator and the Creature," "All for Jesus," "Spiritual Conferences," and "Growth in Holiness." The Fourth Booknot, notably, from any volume in particular-deals with the Four (or five) Last Things, and has for title, "The Thought of the Eternal Years."

"The great central fact both of life and immortality," as Father Faber calls the Incarnation, has been taken for our starting-point; and, amongst other things, it may be remarked that, in the course of our selection, our Blessed Lady is not made the subject of any special section, but is put in her proper place, first by the side of her Divine Son, both in the Gospel story and in its continuation, the Gospel of the Eucharist, and again, in life and in death, by the side of the struggling Christian who, as the Apostle tells us, is one with Christ.

It need only be added that, in every case, the text of the definitive edition of Father Faber's Works has been quoted, and that a full Index will be found at the end of the book.

J. F.



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BOOK I FROM BETHLEHEM TO CALVARY



I

THE DAYS THAT ARE NO MORE

THE Incarnation lies at the bottom of all sciences, and is their ultimate explanation. It is the secret beauty in all arts. It is the completeness of all true philosophies. the point of arrival and departure to all history. destinies of nations, as well as of individuals, group themselves around it. It purifies all happiness, and glorifies all sorrow. It is the cause of all we see, and the pledge of all we hope for. It is the great central fact both of life and immortality, out of sight of which man's intellect wanders in the darkness, and the light of a divine life falls not on his footsteps. Happy are those lands which are lying still in the sunshine of the faith, whose wayside crosses, and statues of the Virgin Mother, and triple angelus each day, and the monuments of their cemeteries, are all so many memorials to them that their true lives lie cloistered in the single mystery of the Incarnation! We too are happy, happy in thinking that there are still such lands, few though they be and yearly fewer, for the sake of Him whom we love, and who reaps from them such an abundant harvest of faith and love. Yet who is there that does not love his

own land best of all? To us it is sad to think of this western island, with its world-wide empire, and its hearts empty of faith, and the true light gone out within them. Multitudes of saints sleep beneath its sod so famous for its greenness. No land is so thickly studded with spire and tower as poor mute England. In no other kingdom are noble churches strewn, with such a lavish hand up and down its hill and dale. Dearest land, thou seemest worth a martyrdom for thine exceeding beauty! It must be the slow martyrdom of speaking to the deaf, of explaining to the blind, and of pleading with the hardened.

Time was, in ages of faith, when the land would not have lain silent, as it lies now, on this eve of the twenty-fifth of March. The sweet religious music of countless bells would be ushering in the vespers of the glorious feast of th Incarnation. From the east, from central Rome, as the day declined, the news of the great feast would come, from cities and from villages, from alpine slope, and blue sea-bay, over the leafless forests and the unthawed snow-drifts on the fallow uplands of France. The cold waves would crest themselves with bright foam as the peal rang out over the narrow channel; and, if it were in Paschal-time, it would double men's Easter joys, and if it were in Lent, it would be a very foretaste of Easter. One moment, and the first English bell would not yet have sounded; and then Calais would have told the news to Dover, and church and chantry would have passed the note on quickly to the old Saxon mother-church of Canterbury. Thence, like a storm of music, would the news of that old eternal decree of God. out of which all creation came, have passed over the Christian island. The saints "in their beds" would rejoice to hear. Augustine, Wilfrid, and Thomas where they lie at Canterbury, Edward at Westminster, our chivalrous protomartyr where he keeps ward amidst his flowery meads in

his grand long abbey at St. Albans, Osmund at Salisbury, Thomas at Hereford, Richard the Wonderful at Chichester, John at Beverley, a whole choir of saints with gentle St. William at York, onward to the glorious Cuthbert, sleeping undisturbed in his pontifical pomp beneath his abbey fortress on the seven hills of Durham. With the cold evening wind the vast accord of jubilant towers would spread over the weald of Kent, amid its moss-grown oaks and waving mistletoe. The low humble churches of Sussex would pass it on, as day declined, to Salisbury, and Exeter, and St. Michael's fief of Cornwall. It would run like lightning up the Thames, until the many-steepled London, with its dense groves of city churches, whose spires stand thick as the shipmasts in the docks, would be alive with the joyous clangour of its airy peals, steadied, as it were, by the deep bass of the great national bell in the tower of Old St. Paul's. Many a stately shrine in Suffolk and Norfolk would prolong the strain, until it broke from the seaboard into all the inland counties, sprinkled with monasteries, and proud parish churches fit to be the cathedrals of bishops elsewhere, while up the Thames by Windsor, and Reading Abbey, and the grey spires of Abingdon, Oxford, with its hundred bells, would send forth its voice over wold and marsh to Gloucester, Worcester, and even down to Warwick and to Shrewsbury, and its southern sound would mingle with the strain that came across from Canterbury, amid the Tudor Churches of the orchardloving Somerset, at the foot of Glastonbury's legendary fane, and on the quays of Bristol, whose princely merchants abjured the slave-trade at the preaching of St. Wulstan. In the heart of the great fen, where the moon through the mist makes a fairyland of the willows and the marshplants, of the stagnant dikes and the peat embankments and the straight white roads, the bells of the royal sanctuary

of Ely would ring out merrily, sounding far off or sounding near as the volumes of the dense night-mist closed or parted, cheating the traveller's ear. A hundred lichenspotted abbeys in those watery lowlands would take up the strain, while Great St. Mary's, like a precentor, would lead the silvery peals of venerable Cambridge, low-lying among its beautiful gardens by the waters of its meadowstream. Lincoln, from its steep capitol, would make many a mile of quaking moss and black-watered fen thrill with the booming of its bells. Monastic Yorkshire, that beautiful kingdom of the Cistercians, would scatter its waves of melodious sound over the Tees into Durham and Northumberland, northward along the conventual shores of the grey North Sea, and westward over the heath-covered fells and by the brown rivers into Lancashire, and Westmoreland. and Cumberland, whose mountain echoes would answer from blue lakes and sullen tarns, and the crags where the raven dwells, and the ferny hollows where the red-deer couches, to the bells of Carlisle, St. Bees, and Furness. Before the cold white moon of March has got the better of the lingering daylight, the island, which seemed to rock on its granite anchors far down within the ocean, as if it tingled with the pulses of deep sound, will have heard the last responses dying muffled in the dusky Cheviots, or in the recesses of gigantic Snowdon, and by the solitary lakes of St. David's land, or trembling out to sea to cheer the mariner as he draws nigh the shore of the Island of the Saints. Everywhere are the pulses of the bells beating in the hearts of men. Everywhere are their hearths happier. Everywhere, over hill and dale, in the street of the town, and by the edge of the fen, and in the rural chapels on the skirts of the hunting-chase, the Precious Blood is being outpoured on penitent souls, and the fires of faith burn brightly, and holiest prayers arise: while

the angels from the southern mouths of the Arun and the Adur to the banks of the brawling Tweed and the sands of the foaming Solway, hear only, from the heart of a whole nation, and from the choirs of countless churches, and from thousands of reeling belfries, one prolonged Magnificat.

These things are changed now. Let them pass. Yet not without regret. It is the Feast of the Incarnation. God is immutable. Our jubilee must be in Him. We must nestle deeper down in His Bosom, while science, and material prosperity, and a literature, which has lost all echoes of heaven, are thrusting men to the edge of external things, and forcing them down the precipice. It may be a better glory for us, if our weakness fail not in the wilderness, that our faith should have to be untied from all helps of sight and sound, and left alone in the unworldly barrenness where God and His eagles are. Poor England! Poor English souls! But it is the Feast of the Incarnation. God is immutable. Our jubilee must be in Him.—"Bethlehem," 48-52.

II

THE INFLUENCE OF THE INCARNATION

The Incarnation has been built up into the whole fabric of our present literature, even in its most irreligious parts. The commonest notions of what is divine have taken their shape from it. The sickly eulogies of a misty, progressive, unindividualized humanity have caught from it whatever in them is not mere sound or insane affectation. Every tenth stone at least in the palace of literature is an idea of the Incarnation. It is the novelty and freshness of all that the modern world has thought and sung and said.

Without it unbelief would not know how to make itself attractive for an hour. Art lives by it, and without it would descend into a pagan copyist to-morrow. Take away the Incarnation, and we may doubt whether art would ever recover itself from the abyss of unhelpful antiquarianism into which it would fall. Systems of philosophy either embody the Incarnation as an element in what they affirm, or they take their shape and consistence from their antagonism to it. In no way and by no manner of device can they clear themselves of it, and exist and utter themselves calmly and loftily as if it had never been. Politics borrow from it even while they are limiting its action; and diplomacy, just in proportion as it is inwardly hostile, grows outwardly respectful. That enthroned Human Nature is the keystone of every arch which sustains modern civilization. Any sort of glory the world could attain to without it now would be but the glory of a ruin. Is there any province of the human mind in which we could now do without it and the congenial ideas to which it has given birth? No present is possible which the past has not begotten, and the present is the only road to the future. Hence the Sacred Humanity has become simply indispensable and inevitable to every possible development and most unthought-of revolution of the world's life, even in spheres the most remote from truth and from religion.

The Sacred Humanity is the king of earth, and is actually resident among us in countless palaces. It leads a hidden life, one most fruitful department of which consists of nothing else than a continual averting of judgments and calamities from the whole race, whose nature has been honoured by the Word's assumption of it. It holds the elements in control, and renders their might more benignant than their laws would have led us to anticipate. It bridles

the earthquake, and tames the pestilence. It keeps men safe on an earth which is always quivering and dipping, turns the wild floods at their most perilous angles, guides into the soft unhurt earth thousands of thunderbolts which would have scathed life, or limb, or property. It beautifies the rough ways of death, even while it bids us tread them as a punishment from which there can be no dispensation. There is not perhaps one human heart from which it has not averted many unknown yet once imminent sorrows. and which it has not saved from pains of the flesh which would have been harder to bear than we like now to think. We do not know what we owe to Mass and the Blessed Sacrament of comfort, peace, and unharmed common life. Last of all, and this would fill a volume, this Sacred Humanity is itself the love of earth, and the magnet of all earth's holy love, causing life to be softer and more bearable, making all that is noble in us divine, ennobling what would else be mean, and just when life seems coming to a point when it must become unendurable, opening a way and letting us down into some sudden bed of roses, which have no thorns, and are so far from enervating the soul that they fortify it as with some heavenly elixir .-"Bethlehem," 290-292.

Ш

"IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD"

WHEN the lark mounts up to heaven to sing its morning hymn, the sounds of labour and the cries of earth, the lowing of the cattle, the rushing of the waters, and the rustling of the leaves, grow fainter and fainter as the bird rises in the air. The wind waves the branches of the trees, but to the bird they wave noiselessly. The morning breeze bends

the silvery side of the uncut grass, where its nest lies hid, till the whole field rises and falls in green and white waves. like the shallows of the sea; but it is all a silent show. No sound reaches the secluded bird in that region of still sunshine, where he is pouring out those glorious hymns, of which we catch only either the prelude as he soars or the last precipitate fragments as he falls to earth from out his shrine of light. So is it with us in prayer, when we rise above our own wants or the outcries of our temptations, and soar in self-forgetting adoration towards the throne of God hidden in light inaccessible. The sounds of earth go first of all. Then the waving, soundless show seems fixed, and still and motionless, and diminished. Next it melts into a confused faint-coloured vision, and soon it lies below in a blue mist, like land uncertainly descried at sea. Then, last of all, the very attraction of earth seems gone, and our soul shoots upward, as if, like fire, its centre was above and not below. Thus must it be with us now for we have to rise to the Bosom of the Eternal Father.

St. Joseph is kneeling by the Child in the cave of Bethlehem. Let us draw near and kneel there with him and follow his thoughts afar off. It is but an hour since that Babe was born into the world, and gladdened Mary's eyes with the divine consolations of His Face. It is but nine months since Hewas incarnate in the inner room at Nazareth. Yet neither Nazareth nor Bethlehem were His beginnings. He was eternal years old the moment He was born. Time, which had already lived through such long cycles, and had perhaps endured through huge secular epochs before the creation of man, was younger by infinite ages than the Babe of Bethlehem. The creation of the angels, with the beauty and exaltation of their first graces, the orderly worship of their hierarchies, their mysterious trial, the dreadful fall of one-third of their number, and Michael's battle with the

rebels, lie dim and remote beyond the furthest mists of human history. Yet the Babe of Bethlehem is older far than that. Indeed, it was around Him that all angelic history was grouped. He was at once their Creator and the pattern after which they were created, the fall of those who fell, and the perseverance of those who stood. Hereafter He will spend a three years' Ministry in Galilee and among the towns of Judah and Benjamin; yèt, in truth, all the history of man's world, from the times of paradise to the hour of the Immaculate Conception, had been His Ministry. He preached before the flood. He gave His benediction to the tents of the patriarchs. He imparted grace, and saved souls, and wrought miracles, in Jewry and in heathendom for some thousands of years. But now by the sand-glasses of men He is one hour old.

This one of the heavenly bodies, which we tenant, was created to be, as it were, the garden, the Eden, of His Incarnation; and He adorned it in His love, before Adam, the first copy of Him, lived among its Asiatic shades. Perhaps it lay for ages in the glad sunshine, solitary, silent, in beautiful desolation, and He took complacence in the adorning of it. He loved perchance to see its beauty ripen, rather than to rise up at once complete. Continents sank slowly at His will, and new oceans rolled above their mountain-tops, or elevated steppes. New lands rose out of the bosom of the deep. Floras of marvellous foliage waved in the sun, and the wisdom and the joy of the Babe of Bethlehem was in them. Faunas, strange, gigantic, terrible, possessed the waters and the land, of His fashioning, and for the delight of His glory. The central fires wrought beautifully and delicately the metals and the gems, which were for the altars of the Babe of Bethlehem, for the tiara of His Vicar, or the chasubles of His priests. The rocks and marbles ripened on the planet, as the fruits ripen

on a tree; and the Babe, the Wisdom of the Father, disported Himself in the vast operation, the pacific uniformity, and the magnificent slowness of His own laws. The grandeur of those huge-leaved trees, the unwieldy life of those extinct monsters, the loveliness of now sunken lands, were all for Him who has just now been born in Bethlehem, and were not only for Him, but were also His own doing.

Bethlehem, then, was not His first home. We must seek Him in an eternal home, if indeed He be older than the angels, the eldest born of creatures. The dark cave within and the moonlit slope without are not like the scenery of His everlasting home. He is the Eternal Word. . . .

The Generation of the Son is not a mystery done and over. It was not an event at some remote point before ever time was. That which is eternal must always be going on. That which can end must have begun. We must be careful therefore always to bear in mind that the coequal, coeternal Son is ever being begotten in the Bosom of the Father, at this moment as well as from forever. There was no moment when He was not begotten, no moment when He is not being begotten, no place through all the amplitudes of omnipresence in which His eternal Generation is not for ever going on, close to us, or far away from us, outside us in outward space, inside us in the noiseless centre of our souls. Yet nowhere is the silence broken by that stupendous utterance of the Father. The omnipresent Word does not so much as vibrate on the air, when He rushes forth with the irresistible might of the Godhead. The clangour of His omnipotence is unheard. His all-embracing light coruscates through the quiet night, and the darkness remains calm and still, like the plumage of a sleeping bird. Oh, how can we ever find a home where we are out of sight and hearing of that utterance of the Father? See how the spirits of angels and the blessed souls of men throng in, all day and night, to witness that eternal utterance, to bathe in its beatific light, and to be enchanted with its spiritual sound! This is the true birth of that Babe of Bethlehem, for ever older than the hill on which Bethlehem is built, for ever younger than the blossom of the wild thyme which opened its pink eye this morning on the green sward, where the sheep were lying when the angels sang in heaven.—"Bethlehem," 5-8, 10, 11.

IV

THE MOTHER OF JESUS

As the Sacred Humanity is the head of creation and the fountain of grace both to angels and to men. and perhaps to other species of rational creations still unborn, so was it meet in the divine dispensations that the Precious Blood of Jesus should merit all the graces necessary to ornament the Word's created home. Now that the Incarnate Word was to come as a Redeemer, His Mother must be redeemed by Him with a singular and unshared redemption. Beautiful as she was in herself, and incalculable as were her merits, her greatest graces were not merited by herself, but by that Precious Blood which was to be taken from her own. The first white lily that ever grew on that ruddy stem was the Immaculate Conception; and when the time for Mary's advent came, that was the first grace with which the Divine Persons began Their magnificent work of adorning. It was a new creation, though it was older in the mind of God, as men would speak, than the first-born angels, or the material planet which, if we are to credit the tales of science, so many secular epochs and millenniums had at last matured for the Incarnation.

It was on the eighth of December that those primeval

decrees of God first began to spring into actual fulfilment upon earth. Like all God's purposes, they came among men with veils upon their heads, and lived in unsuspected obscurity. Yet the old cosmogony of the material world was an event of less moment far than the Immaculate Conception. When Mary's soul and body sprang from nothingness at the word of God, the Divine Persons encompassed Their chosen creature in that selfsame instant, and the grace of the Immaculate Conception was Their welcome and Their touch. The Daughter, the Mother, the Spouse, received one and the same pledge from All in that single grace, or wellhead of graces, as was befitting the grandeur of her predestination, and her relationship to the Three Divine Persons, and the dignity she was to uphold in the system of creation. In what order her graces came, how they were enchained one with another, how one was the cause of another, and how others were merely out of the gratuitous abundance of God, how they acted on her power of meriting, and how again her merits reacted upon them,all this it is beside our purpose to speak of, even if we could do so fittingly. But the commonest grace of the lowest of us is a world of wonders itself, and of supernatural wonders also.

How then shall we venture into the labyrinth of Mary's graces, or hope to come forth from it with anything more than a perplexed and breathless admiration? It was no less than God who was adorning her, making her the living image of the august Trinity. It was that she might be the mother of the Word and His created home, that omnipotence was thus adorning her. To the eve of God her beautiful soul and fair body had glided like stars over the abyss of a creatureless eternity, discernible amid the glowing lights and countless scintillations of the angelic births, across the darkness of chaos and the long epochs of the ripening world. and through the night of four thousand years of wandering and of fall. How must she have come into being, if she was to come worthily of her royal predestination, and of the decrees she was obediently to fulfil, and yet with free obedience!

Out of the abundance of the beautiful gifts with which God endowed her, some colossal graces rose, like lofty mountain-tops, far above the level of the exquisite spiritual scenery which surrounded them. The use of reason from the first moment of her Immaculate Conception enabled her to advance in grace and merits beyond all calculation. Her infused science, which, from its being infused, was independent of the use of the senses, enabled her reason to operate, and thus her merits to accumulate, even during sleep. Her complete exemption from the slightest shade of venial sin raised her as nearly out of the imperfections of a creature as was consistent with finite and created holiness. Her confirmation in grace made her a heavenly being while she was yet on earth, and gave her liberty and merit a character so different from ours that in propositions regarding sin and grace we are obliged to make her an exception, together with our Blessed Lord. So gigantic were the graces of that supernatural life, which God made contemporaneous with her natural existence, that in her very first act of love her heroic virtues began far beyond the point where those of the highest saints have ended.

Mary is like one of those great scientific truths, whose full import we never master except by long meditation, and by studying its bearings on a system, and then at last the fertility and grandeur of the truth seem endless. So is it with the Mother of God. She teaches us God as we never could else have learned Him. She mirrors more of Him in her single self than all intelligent and material creation beside. In her the prodigies of His love towards ourselves

become credible. She is the hill-top from which we gain distant views into His perfections, and see fair regions in Him of which we should not else have dreamed. Our thoughts of Him grow worthier, by means of her. The full dignity of creation shines bright in her, and, standing on her, the perfect mere creature, we look over into the depths of the Hypostatic Union, which otherwise would have been a gulf whose edges we never could have reached. The amount of human knowledge in the present age is overwhelming; yet the deepest thinkers deem science to be only in its infancy. Many things indicate this truth. Just as each science is yearly growing, yearly outgrowing the old systems which held it within too narrow limits, so is the science of Mary growing in each loving and studious heart all through life, within the spacious domains of vast theology; and in heaven it will forthwith outgrow all that earth's theologies have laid down as limits, limits rather necessitated by the narrowness of our own capacities, than drawn from the real magnitude of her whom they define.

Yet we should ill use Mary's magnificence, or rather we should show that we had altogether misapprehended it, if we did not use it as a revelation of God, and an approach to Him. What was it in her which so attracted God? What drew the Word from the Bosom of the Father into her Bosom with such mysterious allurement? It was as if He were following the shadow of His own beauty. It was because the delights of the Holy Trinity were so faithfully imaged there. All was His. It was to His own He went. It was His own which drew Him. He was but falling in love with His own wisdom, when He so loved her. Her natural life was His own idea, her beauty a sparkle of His science, her birth an effortless act of His own almighty will. Her graces were all from Him. She had nothing which she had not received.

Like the moon, her loveliness was all from borrowed light, softening and glorifying even in her a thousand craters of finite imperfection, which would have yawned black and dismal, if the endless shining of the sun had not beaten full upon her, making beautiful and almost luminous the very shadows that are cast from her unevenness. Her grandest realities are but pale reflections of Himself. Her immense sanctity is less than a dew-drop of His uncreated holiness, which the beautiful white lily has caught in its cup and holds up trembling to the sunrise. Thus it is that God is all in all. Thus it is that the higher we rise in the scale of creatures, the less we see that is their own, and the more we see that all is His. The angels gleam indistinguishably bright in their individual brightnesses, because they lie so near to God. In Mary, character, personality, special virtues, cognizable features, the creature's own separate, though not independent, life, are to our eyes almost obliterated, because the bloom of God flushes her all over with its radiance, making herself and the lineaments of self as indistinguishable as a broad landscape beneath the noonday sun. The orb must have sloped far westward before we can measure distances, and discern the separate folds of wood, and the various undulations of the champaign. With Mary, the orb will never slope westward. It will stand vertical for ever. But we shall have a light of glory like a new sense, fortifying our souls, and we shall go into the blaze, and see her there with magnificent distinctness lying deep in the glow of God. She will be a million times more great and beautiful to us then than she is now, and vet we shall see that less than a mote is to the magnitude of the huge sun, so much less that it is a littleness inexpressible, is Mary, the creature, to the greatness, the holiness, the adorable incomprehensibility of her Creator! Yet in Him, not in her, will be our rest. Even Him we shall see as He is! Oh dizzy thought! Most overwhelming truth! Yet nothing less than this Vision, to the very least of us, was the almost incredible purpose of our creation, the glorious consequence of our faint similitude to that Incarnate Word, of whom Mary was the elected mother.—" Bethlehem," 57-60, 60-63.

V

"THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH"

The minutest feature in the most ordinary circumstance of the Creator's assumption of a created nature must be full of significance. From the Gospel narrative of the Annunciation we should infer that Mary had received no warning of what was about to happen, still less therefore of the time when the mystery should be accomplished. Great events commonly cast a peaceful trouble into great souls before they come, as if there was deep down in heroic natures something like a natural gift of prophecy. Such vibrations, awakening yet indistinct, may have thrilled through Mary's soul. Otherwise the mystery took her unawares; and, till the moment came, the greatness of her science and the wonder of her conscious holiness had not so much as excited a suspicion in her beautiful humility.

Her impreparedness thus gives a greater significance to her occupations at the time. The night was still and calm around her. We know not whether Joseph was wakefully pendering on the divine mercies, or whether that man of heavenly dreams was resting from the toils of the artisan's rude day in holy sleep. When the shadow of the everlasting decree stole upon her. Mary, the wonderful and chosen creature, was alone, and, according to the universal belief,

immersed in prayer. She was spending the hours of the silent night in closest union with God. Her spirit then, as always, was doubtless raised in ecstasy to heights of rapturous contemplation. It was in the act of her prayer that the Word took possession of His created home. It was perhaps the immense increase of merit, and so the immense increase of her interior beauty, in that very prayer, which ended the delay, and precipitated the glorious mystery. It was perhaps one of her intense aspirations, an aspiration into which her whole soul and all the might of its purity were thrown, that drew the everlasting Son so suddenly at last from the Bosom of the Father. How often have the desires of the saints been their own immediate fulfilment, because of their intensity! But what desire ever had such intensity, as Mary's yearning for Messias, unless indeed it were His own eternal longing for His created nature? It was at least in an hour of awe-stricken worship that God visited her. Her created spirit was busy in adoration, when the Uncreated came, and took His Flesh and Blood, and dwelt within her. In all this too we see the fashion of God's ways.

Yet His coming was not abrupt. He sent His messenger before He came Himself. We know nothing of the antecedents of the individual angels; but Gabriel appears throughout Scripture, in the days of Daniel as well as those of Mary, to be the angel of the Incarnation. There was doubtless something in his own character, something in his special graces, something in the part he had taken against the rebellious angels, which peculiarly fitted him for this office, to which also he had unquestionably been predestinated from all eternity. It implies an extreme beauty of character, and a special relationship to Each of the Three Divine Persons, and also a peculiar angelical similitude to Mary. He had been throughout the official herald of the

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decrees regarding the Incarnation, and he appears at this time in the midnight room at Nazareth, because the weeks of Daniel have run out, and he is preceding now, hardly by a moment, the everlasting decrees. But what is the especial purpose for which he has come? To ask in the name of God for Mary's consent to the Incarnation. The Creator will not act in this great mystery without His creature's free consent. Her freedom shall be a glorious reflection of His own ineffable freedom in the act of creation.

The Omnipotent stands on ceremony with His feeble, finite creature. He has already raised her too high to be but a blind instrument. Moreover the honour of His own assumption of a created nature is concerned in the liberty wherewith creation shall grant Him what He requires. He would not come, claiming His rights or using His prerogatives. Sometimes we have seen the tide pile up its weltering waves one upon another, as if it were building a tower of water, before some insignificant obstacle which the pressure of one rolling billow would have driven before it far up the sounding beach. This is a picture to us of the moment of the Incarnation. Innumerable decrees of God, decrees without number like the waves of the sea, decrees that included or gave forth all other decrees, came up to the midnight room at Nazareth, as it were, to the feet of that most wonderful of God's creatures, with the resistless momentum which had been given them from eternity, all glistening with the manifold splendours of the divine perfections, like huge billows just curling to break upon the shore; and they stayed themselves there, halted in full course, and hung their accomplishment upon the Maiden's

It was an awful moment. It was fully in Mary's power to have refused. Impossible as the consequences seem to

make it, the matter was with her, and never did free creature exercise its freedom more freely than did she that night. How the angels must have hung over that moment! With what adorable delight and unspeakable complacency did not the Holy Trinity await the opening of her lips, the fiat of her whom God had evoked out of nothingness, and whose own fiat was now to be music in His ears, creation's echo to that fiat of His at whose irresistible sweetness creation itself sprang into being! Earth only, poor, stupid unconscious earth, slept in its cold moonshine. That Mary should have any choice at all is a complete revelation of God in itself. How a creature so encompassed and cloistered in grace could have been free in any sense to do that which was less pleasing to God, is a mystery which no theology to be met with has ever yet satisfactorily explained. Nevertheless the fact is beyond controversy.

She had this choice, with the uttermost freedom in her election, in some most real sense of freedom. But who could doubt what the voice would be, which should come up out of such abysses of grace as hers? There had not been yet on earth, nor in the angels' world, an act of adoration so nearly worthy of God as that consent of hers, that conformity of her deep lowliness to the magnificent and transforming will of God. But another moment, and there will be an act of adoration greater far than that. Now God is free. Mary has made Him free. The creature has added a fresh liberty to the Creator. She has unchained the decrees, and made the sign, and in their procession, like mountainous waves of light, they broke over her in floods of golden splendour. The eternal sea laved the queenly creature all around, and the divine complacency rolled above her in majestic peals of soft mysterious thunder, and a God-like shadow falls upon her for a moment, and Gabriel had disappeared, and without shock, or sound, or so much as a tingling stillness, God in a created nature sate in His immensity within her Bosom, and the eternal will was done, and creation was complete. Far off a storm of jubilee swept far-flashing through the angelic world. But the Mother heard not, heeded not. Her head sank upon her bosom, and her soul lay down in a silence which was like the peace of God. "The Word was made flesh."—"Bethlehem," 66-70.

VI.

THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE PRECURSOR

By a wonderful untimeliness of mercy the unborn Jesus will now go and redeem the Baptist gloriously, while he too is yet unborn. The unincarnate Saviour redeemed millions before His actual Incarnation, His Mother singularly above the rest.

The incarnate but unborn Saviour too shall redeem millions in those nine months, the unborn Baptist singularly above the rest. Like a new pulse of impetuous gladness the Babe in Mary's Bosom drives her forth. With swift step, as if the precipitate gracefulness of her walk were the outward sign of her inward joy, and she were beating time with her body to the music that was so jubilant within, the Mother traverses the hills of Juda, while Joseph follows her in an amazement of revering love. Like Jesus walking swiftly to His Passion, as if Calvary were drawing Him like a magnet, so the staid and modest virgin sped onward to the dwelling of Elizabeth in Hebron. The Everlasting Word within trembled in the tone of Mary's voice, and the babe heard it, and "leaped in His mother's womb," and the chains of original sin fell off from him, and he was justified by redeeming grace, and the full use of his majestic reason

was given to him, and he made acts of adoring love such as never patriarch or prophet yet had made; and he was instantaneously raised to a dazzling height of sanctity, which is a memorial and a wonder in heaven to this day; and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost thrilled through his mother at the moment, and she was filled full of God, and her first act, in consequence of this plenitude of God, was a worshipful recognition of the grandeur of the Mother of God; and all these miracles were accomplished before yet the accents of Mary's voice had died away upon the air.

Straightway the Word arose within His Mother's Bosom, and enthroned Himself upon her sinless heart, and borrowing her voice, which had already been to Him the instrument of His power, the sacrament of John's redemption, He sang the unfathomable *Magnificat*, out of whose depths music has gone on streaming upon the enchanted earth all ages since.—"Bethlehem," 83, 84.

VII

OUR LADY'S EXPECTATION

Thus it was with the great Mother of God, still in the dawn of her virginal youth. All created things had a new meaning to her, now that they were governed from out of her. Men's faces and actions were the language of a new science to her, which philosophy might envy. Meanwhile she was sensibly receiving graces from the Babe, and those graces were unparalleled, not to be so much as imagined by any of us, perhaps barely comprehended by herself. She was consciously growing too in reverence and devotion to St. Joseph, as the image of the Eternal Father. She was

growing out of horself into her office, out of the daughter of Anno into the Mother of God. The marvellous permitted intimacies of the saints with God were as nothing to her collegious, for spiritual collegious, with the Infant Jesus.

Yet will all the growth, for Hypertation was growing also But what was her Experiation like? It was a mister of moment's or. Ill godies tings are serous. They maent so by their own right. They sing songs in the soul even annoist the agomes of nature. There is no making them otherwise than levens. They have touched God, and so they carry with them an irresistible gladness everywhere. They have an unquenchable sunshine of their own, which the surrounding darkness only makes more startlingly length. The thorns of mortification thus become a bed of reses, yet not a thorn is blunted. nor is nature spared a wound. The pains of marry riom attune themselves to this inward jubilee, and vet are pains as they were before. Now Mary's Expectation was full of Cod, and therefore it was lovens. It had two intensities of for in it. The intensity of created holinoss thirsting for to signt of God, and the intensity of an earthly methods desire natural simple and luman, but immensely since fied, to see the Pace of Her Babe, whom she knew to be God as well . . .

She was on the point of seeing that human Face which was to light up all the vast beaven for eternity, and be to it instand of san and moon. She was to drink thal love and welcome and complacency out of the very eyes, whose beams would point ever asting contentment into the millions of the Blessed round the throne. She was to see this Face daily, lourly, momentarily for years. She was to watch it broaden, lengthen and grow larger, putting off and taking on the expression of the successive ages of luman life. She was to see it in the seening unconsciousness of child-

hood, in the peculiar grace of boyhood, in the pensive serenity of the upgrown man; she was to see it in the rapture of divine contemplation, in the compassionate tenderness of love, in the effulgence of heavenly wisdom, in the glow of righteous indignation, in the pathetic gravity of deep sadness, in the moments of violence, shame, physical pain, and mental agony.

In each of its varying phases it was to her not less than a revelation. She was to do almost what she willed with this divine Face. She might press it to her own face in the liberties of maternal love. She might cover with kisses the lips that are to speak the doom of all men. She might gaze upon it unrebuked, when it was sleeping or waking, until she learned it off by heart. When the Eternal was hungry, that little Face would seek her breast and nestle there. She would wipe off the tears that ran down the infant cheeks of uncreated Beatitude. Many a time in the water of the fountain would she wash that Face, while the Precious Blood mantled in it with the coldness of the water or the soft friction of her hand, and made it tenfold more beautiful. One day it was to lie white, blood-stained, and dead upon her lap, while for the last time the old ministries of Bethlehem, so touchingly misplaced, would have to be renewed on Calvary.

In this Face she would see a likeness of herself. She would be able to trace her own lineaments in His. What an overwhelming mystery for a creature, overwhelming especially to her immense humility! No other creature was ever in like case on earth, nor ever will be. He will give all of us His glorious likeness in heaven after the resurrection; but she first gave to Him what He will give to us. God gave her His own image; she, as it were, returns it to Him after another sort. His very likeness to His Mother makes Him seem to fit more completely into His own

creation. In truth, it was a Face of a thousand mysteries. and she might well long to see it unveiled, and as it were inaugurated among the visible things of earth. As a creature, and as the highest of all mere creatures, she might long to see it: but her longing as a mother was something more than that. When we have imagined to ourselves all that we can imagine of the purity, intensity, and gladness of a mother's love, we have still to remember that she, who longed to see her Child's Face, was the Mother of God, and the Face she longed to see the Face of the Incarnate God. Yet the human element of maternal love in its highest perfection must always remain in our minds as an ingredient of her Expectation. Moreover the Vision, for which she was yearning, was the vision of that same Face and Features which the Eternal Word Himself had been looking at with love, desire, and unspeakable expectation from eternity. It was a dear vision which He had cherished and made much of all through the creatureless eternity. So that Mary's devotion to the sight of that blessed Face was one of those shadows of eternal things which were cast upon her from out of God, as the mountains are imaged in the placid

Peculiar and unprecedented as was this life of Mary, her Expectation is nevertheless a beautiful rich type of all Christian life. Jesus is in each of us by His essence, presence, and power, and is inwardly and intimately concurring to every thought of our minds, as well as to all our outward actions. His supernatural indwelling in our souls by grace is a thing more wonderful than all miracles, and has a more efficacious energy. An attentive and pious meditation on the doctrine of grace positively casts a shadow over our spirits, because of the greatness of our gifts and our dizzy nearness to God, and we work under that shadow in hallowed fear, those fearing most who love most. Through grace He

is continually being born in us and of us, by the good works which He enables us to do, and by our correspondence to grace, which is in truth a grace itself. So that the soul of one who is in a state of grace, is a perpetual Bosom of Mary, an endless inward Bethlehem. In seasons, after Communion, He dwells in us really and substantially as God and Man; for the same Babe that was in Mary is also in the Blessed Sacrament. What is all this, but a participation in Mary's life during those wonderful months?

What comes of it to us is precisely what came of it to her,—a blissful Expectation. We are always expecting more holiness, more of Him in future years, new sights of His Face in the stillness of recollection down in the twilight of our souls; and like Mary, we are expecting Calvary as well as Bethlehem. Who is there before whose eyes at least a confused vision of suffering is not perpetually resting? What is past of life assures us that suffering must form no trifling part of what is yet to come. Besides, we all have prophecies of cares and troubles, and there is no sunshine into which the tall ends of the shadows of coming sorrows do not enter, and repose there with a soft umbrage which is almost beautiful and almost welcome. At any rate, there is death to come, and that is a strait gate at its best estate. But we are expecting also, as Mary was, the sight of our Lord's Human Face. In all our time there will not be a point more notable, more truly critical, than that at which the Vision of His Face will break upon us. Our judgment on the outskirts of the invisible world will be our Cave of Bethlehem: for then first shall we really see His Face. Yet even that sight will not altogether end our expectation; for we shall take sweet expectation with us into purgatory, where it will feed on the memory of that Divine Face which for one moment had been unveiled before us. After that, there is a home close by the Babe of Bethlehem. It is our

home as well as Mary's home. It is an eternal home; and there, and there only, we shall expect no more.—" Bethlehem," 92, 93, 95-97, 98-100.

. VIII

"HE CAME UNTO HIS OWN, AND HIS OWN RECEIVED HIM NOT"

To all but its Creator the world makes no difficulty of at least a twofold hospitality, to be born and to die, to come into the world and to go out of it. Yet how did it treat Him in both these respects? He was driven among the animals and beasts of burden to be born. That little village of the least of tribes said truly it had no room for the Immense and the Incomprehensible. Bethlehem could not indeed hold her, who held within herself the Creator of the world. There was an unconscious truth even in its inhospitality. He was to be born outside the walls of Bethlehem, as He died outside the walls of Jerusalem. Thus He had truly no native town. The sinless cattle gave Him ungrudging welcome, and an old cavity in the earth, firerent or water-worn, furnished Him with a roof somewhat less cold than the starry sky of a winter's night. So far as men were concerned, it was as much as He could do to get born, and obtain a visible foothold on the earth. So He was not allowed to die a natural death. His life was trampled out of Him, as something tiresome and reproachful, or rather dishonourable and ignominious. He was buried swiftly, that His Body might not be cumbering the earth, polluting the sunshine, or offending the gay city on the national festival. And all the while He was God! These are old thoughts, but they are always new. They grow deeper, as we dwell upon them. We sink further down into them, as we grow older. Every time we think them, they so take us by surprise that it is as if we were now thinking them for the first time. No words do justice to them. The tears of the saints are more significant than words; but they cannot express the astonishing mystery of this inhospitable Bethlehem, which will not give its God room to be born within its walls.

Alas! the spirit of Bethlehem is but the spirit of a world which has forgotten God. How often has it been our own spirit also? How are we through churlish ignorance for ever shutting out from our doors heavenly blessings! Thus it is that we mismanage all our sorrows, not recognizing their heavenly character, although it is blazoned after their own peculiar fashion upon their brows. God comes to us repeatedly in life, but we do not know His full face. We only know Him when His back is turned, and He is departing after our repulse. Why is it that with a theory almost always right, our practice should be so often wrong? It is not so much from a want of courage to do what we know to be our duty, although nature may rebel against it. It is rather from a want of spiritual discernment. We do not sufficiently, or of set purpose, accustom our minds to supernatural principles.

The world's figures are easiest to count by, the world's measures the most handy to measure by. It is a tiresome work to be always looking at things from a different point of view from those around us; and, when this effort is to be lifelong, it becomes a strain which cannot be continuous: and it only ceases to be a strain, by our becoming thoroughly supernaturalized. Thus it is that a ('hristian life, which has not made a perfect revolution in a man's worldly life, becomes no Christian life at all, but only an incommodious unreality, which gets into our way in this life without helping

us into the life to come. Hence it is that we do not know God when we see Him. Hence it is that we so often find ourselves on the wrong side, without knowing how we got there. Hence it is that our instincts so seldom grasp what they are feeling after, our prophecies so often come untrue, our aims so constantly miss their ends. God is always taking us by surprise, when we have no business to be surprised at all. Bethlehem did not in the least mean what it was doing. No one means half the evil which he does. Hence it is a grand part of God's compassion to look more at what we mean than what we do. Yet it is a sad loss for ourselves to be so blind. Is it not, after all, the real misery of life, the compendium of all its miseries, that we are meeting God every day, and do not know Him when we see Him ?—" Bethlehem," 107-109.

TX

"THE OX KNOWETH HIS OWNER, AND THE ASS HIS MASTER'S CRIR "

AT times there is something startling in the seeming proximity of the animal kingdom to God. Moreover all the inferior animals, with their families, shapes, colours, cries, manners, and peculiarities, represent ideas in the divine mind, and are partial disclosures of the beauty of God, like the foliage of trees, the gleaming of metals, the play of light in the clouds, the multifarious odours of wood and field, and the manifold sound of waters. It was then, if we may use such an expression, a propriety of divine art, that the inferior creatures should be represented in the picture of their Maker's temporal nativity. While the sheep lay on the starlit slopes outside, the ox and the ass stood sentinels.

full of patient significance and dumb expression, at His manger. The herds of cattle, which were collected within the walls of Ninive, were one of God's reasons for sparing the repentant city. The wild beasts in the wilderness were His companions during His mysterious Lent; and, as all beasts are symbols of something beautiful and wise in God, so has He many times vouchsafed in His revealed word to make them the symbolical language by which He has conveyed hidden truths to men. They were not without their meaning in the scene of the Nativity. They remind us that the Babe of Bethlehem was the Creator. Their presence is another of His condescensions. He is not only rejected of men, but He trespasses, so to speak, on the hospitality of beasts. He shares their home, and they are well content. They welcome Him with unobtrusive submission, and do what little they can to temper with their warm breath the rigour of the winter night. If they make no show of reception, at least they deny Him not the room He asks on His own earth. They make way for Him, and there was more worship even in that than Bethlehem would give Him. . . .

Our Lord's companionship with the inferior animals was one of those glorious humiliations which have become honourable mysteries. But He was not only their companion. He was laid in their Manger as if He was their food, the food of beasts, that so He might become in very truth the food of sinners. This Manger was the second of the material objects which were round about Him. While it was a deep shame, it was also a sweet prophecy. It fore-told the wonders of His altar. It was the type of His most intimate and amazing communion with men. It was a symbol of the incredible abundance and commonness of His grace. It was a foreshadowing of His sacramental residence with men from the Ascension to the Doom. It was like the

sort of box or crib we sometimes see at foundling hospitals, into which the deserted child is put, with none to witness the conflict of agony and love in her who leaves it there. It is as if He were placed in the Manger like a fatherless foundling, with the whole of the unkind world for His hospital.

The rough Straw is the quilting of His crib; and the refuse of an oriental threshing-floor is not like the carefully husbanded straw of our own land. Men made Him as a worm, and no man, in the onslaughts of His Passion. He Himself in His first infancy makes His bed as though He were a beast of burden, a beast tamed and domesticated for the use of men. The vilest things in creation are good enough for the Creator. He even exhibits a predilection for them. The refuse of men, -that is the portion of God. It is not only that we give it Him; He chooses it: and His choice teaches us strange things, and stamps its peculiar character on Christian sanctity. Such is the furniture of the nursery of the King of kings. The light of Joseph's lantern shoots here and there redly and imperfectly through the darkness, and we see the faces of the dumb Beasts, with the pathetic meekness in their eyes, and the rough Manger worn smooth and black and glistening, and the Straw scattered here and there and bruised beneath the feet of the animals, and so perchance rendered less sharp and prickly as a couch for the new-born Babe.—" Bethlehem." 128. 129, 130-132.

X

THE BIRTH OF THE DIVINE CHILD

THE Beasts, the Manger, the Straw, the Darkness, and the Cold! Such were the preparations which God made for Himself. From the first dawn of creation every step, and there were countless of them, in the worlds both of spirit and of matter, was a preparation for Jesus. It was a step towards the Incarnation, which was at once the cause and the model of it. While each step seemed to take creation further on, it also brought it a step backward, a step homeward, a step nearer to the original idea of it all in the mind of God. The creation of the angels was a step towards Jesus. The successive epochs in which our planet was ripening for the abode of man, and the successive forms of vegetation and of life, which God caused to defile before Him in the slow order characteristic of all His works were all steps towards Jesus. The patriarchs and the prophets, the history of the chosen people which was a prophecy of the future at the same moment that it was a free drama of the present, the unconstrained realized allegories of the lives of the typical saints, the rise and fall of each system of Greek or Oriental philosophy, the fortunes and destinies of the empires which thrust each other from the stage of the world's history, all these were steps to Jesus, all were the remote or proximate preparations for the Incarnation. When the Babe Mary was born of Anne, the world little dreamed how God was quickening His step. Mary and Joseph were the proximate preparations for Nazareth, and for the midnight mystery of the unspeakable Incarnation. Each of these steps, as we study them, tells us something more about God than we knew before. The knowledge of Him grows into us through the contemplation of them. But the grace of the Immaculate Conception was like the opening of heaven. It seemed as if the next moment men must see God; and so it was, as moments count with God. Now we have come to the proximate preparations of Bethlehem, the Beasts, the Manger, the Straw, the Darkness, and the Cold.

But these things are spiritual types as well as material

realities. Matter has many times masked angels. There were five spiritual presences in the Cave of Bethlehem, which these five material things most aptly represented. There were Poverty, Abandonment, Rejection, Secrecy, and Mortification. They started with the Infant Jesus from the Cave, and they went with Him to the Tomb. They are stern powers, and their visages unlovely, and their voices harsh, and their company unwelcome to the natural man. But to the eye, which grace has cleansed, they are beautiful exceedingly, and their solemnity inviting, and their spells, like those of earthly love, making the heart to burn, and full often guiding life into a romance of sanctity. companionship of the Beasts, and the room they had as it were lent Him to be born in, betokened His exceeding Poverty. The Manger was the type of His Abandonment. Could any figure have been more complete? The refuse Straw, on which He lay, and which perhaps Joseph gathered from under the feet of the cattle, well expressed that Rejection, wherewith men have visited and will visit Him and His Church through all generations till the end.

The Darkness round Him was a symbol of those strange and manifold Secrecies in which He loves to shroud Himself, like the eclipse on Calvary, or the impenetrable thinness of the sacramental veils. The wintry Cold, which caused His delicate frame to shudder and to feel its first pain, was the fitting commencement of that incessant penance and continuous Mortification which the All-holy and the Innocent underwent for the redemption of the guilty. These five things stood like spiritual presences around His crib, waiting for His coming, Poverty, Abandonment, Rejection, Secrecy, and Mortification. Alas! we must be changed indeed before such attendance shall be choice of ours! Yet have they not been evermore the five sisters of all the saints of God?...

But why are we thus lingering so long on the threshold of the great event? Is it that the night draws on so slowly, or that our desires are cold and unimpassioned? Love surely knows full well of that impatience which delays, whose very fire causes it to hesitate, to tremble, to grow calm. We are looking on the sights which Mary's eyes beheld. It is sometimes said that she was so poor, that she was unable to make better preparation for the coming of the Babe. By no means let us think this. It could have been otherwise had Mary so chosen. If the Birth of her Beloved was to be in a stable, and after the rejection of inhospitable Bethlehem, she could have furnished other lining for the manger than the crisp and prickly straw. She, who was prepared with the swaddling-clothes, might have been ready with better protection against the cold of the rigorous night.

These accidents were not the necessities of the Mother's poverty; they were the heroisms of her obedience. They were the Son's choice, and the Mother knew well beforehand what He had chosen. For nine months at least, if not before, she had seen only with His eyes, and loved only with His heart. She was in His confidence, and His tastes were her tastes. His heavenly standards her weights and measures also. Often in vision had she seen the Cave, and had been ravished with the spiritual beauty of the unworldly preparations. Now the hour was come, and she was looking on the realities. They were a heavenly science to her, a most beautiful theology. She saw them not as we see them, merely on the surface, as mirrors imaging divine things, but mistily and brokenly. She saw deep into their wonderful significance. Long processions of fair truths rose up and came out of each of them. Their mysteries stood still, while she gazed upon them. She beheld the accomplishment of their prophecies, the strangeness of their proprieties, the gracefulness of their unworldly lineaments. Light from

heaven was round about them, the radiance of the eternal splendours. They raised her soul to God, and she entered into a blissful ecstasy, a state which, if not natural to her, as some suppose, was at all events ever nigh at hand, when she let her thoughts fly freely to the centre of their rest.

Such was the unspeakable magnificence of her soul, that we cannot doubt that the operations of grace within it during that ecstasy were more numerous and manifold, as well as incomparably more elevated, than those which fill a saint's whole life, and call forth in us intelligent wonder, and enthusiastic praise of God. Yet in her these operations were also divinely simple, with an absorbing simplicity which no saint has ever known. Her mighty soul strives to grow to the height and stature of the mystery, and falls far short of its incomprehensibility. It is a fresh joy, a rapturous redoublement of ecstasy, that it is in truth beyond her comprehension; and more than ever she desires to look upon that little Face, which shall express to her in its silentness those mysteries which words cannot paint, and to the conception of which busy thought can give neither hue nor form. Evermore the Beasts, and the Manger, and the Straw, and the Darkness, and the Cold seem to flit before her in her eestasy, uncertainly and double-faced, one while showing their definite material features, and another while turning upon her the beautiful countenances of Poverty, Abandonment, Rejection, Secrecy, and Mortification.

She looked upward, and beheld those abysses in God, which these outward things betokened. She looked inward, with her new, nine months' habit, for that was to her what upward was to all other adoring souls of men, and she trembled at the greatness of the mystery; she desired, even while her humility feared lest a desire should be a will: but the desire of her heart, like a shaft that cannot be recalled,

had sped its way. It reached the heart of the Babe, and at once she felt the touch of God, and was unutterably calm, and Jesus lay on the ground on the skirt of her robe, and she fell down before Him to adore. Twice had her pure desire drawn Him from the home of His predilection, once from the uncreated Bosom of the Father, and once from her own created Bosom which He tenanted. It was as if the sweet will of Mary were the timepiece of the divine decrees.—"Bethlehem," 133-135, 138-140.

XI

"JESUS CHRIST, YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY"

Long centuries have come and gone. The world has plunged forward through many revolutions. Almost all things are changed. There has been more change than men could have dreamed of. It seems incredible, even as a matter of history. The actual past has been more wonderful than any sibylline oracle would have dared to depict the future. History is more fantastic than prophecy. Time moves, but eternity stands still; and thus amidst perpetual change the faith, which is the representative of eternity on earth, remains, and is at rest; and its unchangeableness is our repose.

The Bethlehem of that night, of those forty days, has never passed away. It lives a real life; not the straggling Christian village, on which the Mussulman yoke seems to sit so lightly, on its stony ridge; but the old Bethlehem of that momentous hour, when the Incarnate God lay on the ground amid the cattle in the cave. It lives, not only in the memory of faith, but in faith's actual realities as well. It lives a real, unbroken, unsuspended life, not in history

only, or in art, or in poetry, or even in the energetic fertile worship and fleshly hearts of the faithful, but in the worshipful reality of the Blessed Sacrament. Round the tabernacle, which is our abiding Bethlehem, goes on the same world of beautiful devotion which surrounded the newborn Babe, real, out of real hearts, and realized by God's acceptance.

But independently of this august reality, Bethlehem exists as a living power in its continual production of supernatural things in the souls of men. It is for ever alluring them from sin. It is for ever guiding them to perfection. It is for ever impressing peculiar characteristics on the holiness of different persons. It is a divine type, and is moulding souls upon itself all day long, and its works remain, and adorn the eternal home of God. A supernatural act of love from a soul in the feeblest state of grace is a grander thing than the discovery of a continent or the influence of a glorious literature. Yet Bethlehem is eliciting tens of thousands of such acts of love each day from the souls of men.

It is a perpetual fountain of invisible miracles. It is better than a legion of angels in itself, always hard at work for God, and magnificently successful. Its sphere of influence is the whole wide world, the regions where Christmas falls in the heart of summer, as well as in these lands of ours. It whispers over the sea, and hearts on shipboard are responding to it. It is everywhere in dense cities, where loathsome wickedness is festering in the haunts of hopeless poverty, keeping itself clean there as the sunbeams of heaven. It vibrates up deep mountain glens, which the foot of priest rarely treads, and down in damp mines, where death is always proximate and sacraments remote. It soothes the aching heart of the poor pontiff on his throne of heroic suffering and generous self-sacrifice; and it cradles to rest the sick child who, though it cannot read as yet, has

a picture of starry Bethlehem in its heart, which its mother's words have painted there. Bethlehem is daily a light in a thousand dark places, beautifying what is harsh, sanctifying what is lowly, making heavenly the affections which are most of earth. It is all this, because it is an inexhaustible depth of devotion supplying countless souls of men with stores of divine love, of endless variety, and yet all of them of most exquisite loveliness.—" Bethlehem," 163-165.

XII

THE FOSTER-FATHER

LIKE the fountains of the sacred river of the Egyptians, St. Joseph's early years are hidden in an obscurity, which his subsequent greatness renders beautiful, just as the sunset is reflected in the dark and clouded east. He was doubtless high in sanctity before his Espousals with Mary. God's eternal choice of him would seem to imply as much. During the nine months the accumulation of grace upon him must have been beyond our powers of calculation. The company of Mary, the atmosphere of Jesus, the continual presence of the Incarnate God, and the fact of his own life being nothing but a series of ministries to the unborn Word, must have lifted him far above all other saints, and perchance all angels too. Our Lord's Birth, and the sight of His Face, must have been to him like another sanctification. The mystery of Bethlehem was enough of itself to place him among the highest of the saints. As with Mary, self-abasement was his grandest grace. He was conscious to himself that he was the shadow of the Eternal Father, and this knowledge overwhelmed him. With the deepest reverence he hid himself in the constant thought of the dignity of

his office, in the profoundest self-abjection. Commanding makes deep men more humble than obeying. St. Joseph's humility was fed all through life by having to command Jesus, by being the superior of his God. The priest, who has most reason to deplore the poverty of his attainments in humility, is humble at least when he comes to consecrate at Mass. For years Joseph lived in the awful sanctity of that which to the priest is but a moment. The little house at Nazareth was as the outspread square of the white corporal. All the words he spoke were almost words of consecration. A life worthy of this, up to the mark of this,—what a marvel of sanctity it must have been!

To be hidden in God, to be lost in His bright light, is surely the highest of vocations among the sons of men. Nothing, to a spiritually discerning eye, can surpass the grandeur of a life which is only for others, only ministering to the divine purposes as in the place of God, without any personal vocation, or any purpose of its own. This is the exceeding magnificence of Mary, that her personality is almost lost in her official vicinity to God. This too in its measure was Joseph's vocation. He lives now only to serve the Infant Jesus, as heretofore he has but lived to guard Mary, the lily of God. He is, as it were, the head of the Holy Family, only that, like a good superior, he may the more completely be the servant, and the subject, and the instrument. Moreover he makes way for Jesus, when Jesus comes of age. He passes noiselessly into the shadow of eternity, like the moon behind a cloud, complaining not that her silver light is intercepted. He does not live on to the days of the miracles and the preaching, much less to the fearful grandeurs of Gethsemane and Calvary. His spirit is the spirit of Bethlehem. He is, in an especial way, the property of the Sacred Infancy. It was his one work. his single sphere. . . .

With some there are seasons, seasons which come, and do their work, and go, during which they seem blessedly possessed with the spirit of Bethlehem, and in those times nothing is seen of Calvary but its blue outline, like a mountain on the horizon. Grace has something especial to do in the soul, and it does it in this way. St. Joseph must be our patron at those seasons, as having been sanctified himself with an apparent exclusiveness, by these very mysteries of Bethlehem. Yet it was not with him, neither will it be with us, a devotion of unmingled sweetness. At the bottom of the Crib lies the Cross; and the Infant's Heart is a living Crucifix, for all He sleeps so softly and looks so fair. From Joseph's first fear for Mary, and the mystical darkness of his tormenting perplexity, to the very day when he laid his tired head on the lap of his Foster-Son, and slept his last sleep, it was one continued suffering, the torture of anxiety without the imperfection of disquietude. The very awe of the nine months must have killed with its perpetual sacred pressure all that was merely natural within him; and our inner nature never dies a painless death, as the outer sometimes does. Poverty must have appeared to him in a new light, less easy to bear, when Jesus and Mary were concerned. The rude men and unsympathizing women of Bethlehem were but the forerunners of the dark-eyed idolaters of Egypt, with their jealous suspicions of the Hebrew stranger, while his weak arm was the only rampart God had set round the Mother and the Child. The flight into Egypt and the return from it, the fears which would not let him dwell in the Holy City, and the rustic unkindliness of the ill-famed Nazarenes, all these were so many Calvaries to Joseph. Sweet and beautiful as is the look of Bethlehem, they who carry the Infant Jesus in their souls carry the Cross also, and where He pillows His Head, He leaves the marks behind Him of an unseen crown of thorns. In truth, the

death of Joseph was itself a martyrdom. He was worn out with love of the Holy Child. It was love, divine love, which slew him; so that his devotion was like that of the Holy Innocents, a devotion of martyrdom and blood.

The foundation therefore of Joseph's devotion was, as with Mary, his humility. Yet his humility was somewhat different from hers. It was another kind of grace. It was less self-forgetting. Its eve was always on its own unworthiness. It was a humility that for ever seemed surprised at its own gifts and yet so tranquil, that there was nothing in it either of the precipitation or the ungracefulness of a surprise. He was unselfishness itself, the very personification of it. His whole life meant others, and did not mean himself. This was the significance of his vocation. He was an instrument with a living soul, an accessory, not a principal, a superior, only to be the more a satellite. He was simply the visible providence of Jesus and Mary. But his un selfishness did not take the shape of self-oblivion.

Hence his peculiar grace was self-possession. Calmness amid anxiety, considerateness amid startling mysteries, a quiet heart combined with an excruciating sensitiveness, a self-consciousness maintained for the single purpose of an unintermitting immolation of self, the promptitude of docility grafted on the slowness of age and the measuredness of natural character, unbroken sweetness amid harassing cares, abrupt changes, and unexpected situations, a facile passiveness under each movement of grace, each touch of God's finger, as if he were floating over earth rather than rooted in it, the seeming victim of a wayward romantic lot and of dark divine enigmas, yet calm, incurious, unquestioning, unbewildered, reposing upon God,—these are the operations of grace which seem to us so wonderful in Joseph's soul. It was a soul, which glassed in its pellucid tranquillity all the images of heavenly things that were round about

it. When mysterious graces were showered down upon him, there is hardly a stir to be seen upon his silent passiveness. He seems to take them as if they were the common sunshine, and the common air, and the dew which fell on all men, and not on himself alone. He was like the speechless, silver-shining, glassy lake, just trembling with the thin noiseless raindrops, while it rather hushes than quickens its only half-audible pulses on the blue gravelled shore. It almost seemed as if, joined with his self-possession, there was also an unconsciousness of his great graces, if we could think that great saints did not know their graces as none others know them. He was not a light that shone, he was rather an odour that breathed, in the house of God. He was like the mountain woods in the wet weeping summer. They speak to heaven by their manifold fragrances, which yet make one woodland odour, like the many dialects of a rich language, as if the fresh wind-driven drops beat the sensitive leaves of many hidden and sequestered plants, and so made them give out their perfumes, just as sorrow by its gentle bruising brings out hidden sweetness from all characters of men. So it was with St. Joseph. He moves about among the mysteries of the Sacred Infancy, a shy silent figure. Between the going and coming of great mysteries we just hear him, as we hear the rain timidly whispering among the leaves in the intervals of the deeptoned thunder. But his odour is everywhere. It is the very genius of the place. It clings to our garments and lingers in our senses, even when we have left the cave of Bethlehem and gone out into the world's work.

His mind was turned inward upon his dread office, rather than outward on the harvest of God's glory among men. This follows from his self-possession. He stood in an official position; but it was only towards God, not towards both God and men, as was our Lady's case. Hence there was

less of the spirit of oblation about Joseph than about Mary. He and God were together. He knew not of others, except as making him suffer, and so winning themselves titles to his love. The sacerdotal character of Mary's holiness was not apparent in him. He was a priest of the Infant Jesus, neither to sacrifice Him nor to offer Him, but only to guard Him, to handle Him with reverence and to worship Him. Like a deacon he might bear the Precious Blood, but not consecrate it. Or he was the priestly sacristan to whose custody the tabernacle was committed. This was more his office than saying Mass. All this was in keeping with his reserve. It was to be expected that the shadow of the Eternal Father should move without sound over the world. Shadows speak only by the shade they cast, deepening, beautifying, harmonizing all things, filling the hearts they cover with the mute eloquence of tenderest emotions. God is perhaps more communicative than He is reserved. For, though He has told us less than He has withheld, yet how much more out of sheer love has He told us than we needed to know; and what has He kept back except that which because of our littleness we could not know, or that which for our good it was better we should not know?

Some saints represent to us this communicativeness of God, and others His reserve. St. Joseph is the head and father of these last. It is strange that while saints have often shown forth to men the union of justice and of mercy which there is in God, or the combination of swiftness and of slowness in the divine operations, and others of the apparent contrarieties in God, no saint appears to have ever copied him in the union of communicativeness and of reserve. We find that illustrated only in the Incarnate Word and His Immaculate Mother. St. Joseph was the image of the Father. The Father had spoken once, speaks now, His unbroken Eternal Word. Joseph needed but to stand by in

silence, and fold gently in his arms that Word which the Father was yet speaking. The manifested Word, the outpoured Spirit, of Them Joseph was not the representative. They only hung him round with the splendours of Their dear love, because he was the image of the Father. Such does he seem to our eyes, such is the image of him which rests in our loving hearts,—mute, rapture-bound, awestricken, with his soul tranquil, unearthly, shadowy, like the loveliness of night, and the beautiful age upon his face speaking there like a silent utterance, a free, placid, and melodious thanksgiving to the Most Holy Trinity.—"Bethlehem," 181, 182, 183-187.

XIII

THE ANGELS AT THE CRIB

How beautiful to our eyes is that vast angelic world, with its various kingdoms of holy wonders and of spiritual magnificence! It is well worth while for a theologian to spend his whole life, lying on the confines of that bright creation, to mark the lights and gleams which come to him from out of those realms of the eldest-born sons of God. It is not only sweet to learn of those whose companions in bliss we hope some day to be, and one of whose royal princes is ever at our side even now, ennobling rather than demeaning himself by ministries of secret love. But it is sweeter still to know so much more of God as even our imperfect theology of the Angels can teach us. No one knows the loveliness of moonlight till he has beheld it on the sea. So does the ocean of angelic life on its clear field of boundless waters reflect, and as it were magnify by its reflection, the shining of God's glory. Devotion to the Angels is a devotion which

emancipates the soul from littleness, and gives it blissful habits of unearthly thought. Purer than the driven snow are all those countless spirits, pure in the exuberance of their own beautiful natures, not by the toilsome chastening of austerity, nor by the quick or gradual death of nature at the hands of grace. Mary, their queen, looks down into them for evermore, and the white light of her exceeding purity is reflected in them, as in deep still waters. They come nearest to God, and it is one of the rubrics of heaven's service that the incense of men's prayers should be burned before God by Angels.

Yet they are our kin. We look up to them more as elder brothers than as creatures set far apart from us by the preeminence of their natures. We love them with a vearning love; we make sure of being the comrades of their eternal joys; we even imitate their impossible heights without despair; for their beauty invigorates, rather than disheartens us. It is an endless delight to us that they serve God so well, while we are serving Him so poorly, and that they themselves so abound in love, that they joy in the love of men. Yet truly why should they not prize what even God so ineffably desires? Beautiful land! beautiful bright people! how wonderfully the splendour of creation shines in them, while from off their ceaseless wings they are ever scattering lights and odours, which are all of God and from God's home, and make us homesick, as exiles are who smell some native almost-forgotten flower, or hear the strains of some long-silent patriotic melody. No cold gulf is between us and those angelic spirits. Like a ship that hangs upon a summer sea with its fair white sails, and one while seems to belong to the deep blue, and another while to be rather a creature of the sunny air, so do the dear Angels hang, and brood, and float over this sea of human joys and sorrows, never too high above us to be beyond our reach, and more

often mingling, like Raphael, their unsullied light with our darkness, as if they were but the best, the kindest, and the noblest of ourselves.

Immense was their devotion to the Babe of Bethlehem. He was the cause of their perseverance and its means. There is not a grace in the deep treasuries of their rapturous being, which is not from the Babe of Bethlehem, and from Him, not simply as the Word, but as the Incarnate Word. It was the vision of His Sacred Humanity which was at once their trial, their sanctification, and their perseverance. The Babe of Bethlehem was shown to them amid the central fires of the Godhead, and they adored, and loved, and humbled themselves before that lower nature which it was His good pleasure to assume. They greeted with acclamations of exulting loyalty the announcement that His mortal Mother was to be their queen. They longed for the day when Anna's child should gladden the distant earth, and heaven has scarce heard sweeter music than they made on the day she was assumed and crowned. Thus devotion to the Holy Child was more than a devotion to them; it was their salvation; it was their religion. They almost longed it was their redemption also. If the weakness and infirmity of His Incarnation was a glorious probation to them, and to their fallen brethren a fatal stumbling-block, the littleness and seeming dishonour of His Childhood formed as it were the extreme case of the Incarnation; for they had not even the dignity of victim and of sacrifice which clad as with a mantle the shame and violence of Calvary.

We cannot doubt therefore of their special attraction to the Sacred Infancy. Christmas has always seemed to all men as one of the Angels' feasts. With what holy envy then must they not have regarded the fortunate Gabriel, waiting on Daniel, the man of desires, and inspiring him with sweet precipitate prophecies, and still more when he 46

went forth on his embassies that were preparatory to the great mystery, bearing messages to Joachim and Anna, to Zacharias and Elizabeth; but most of all they envied him when he went to Nazareth at midnight and saluted Mary with a salutation which was not his alone, but the salutation of the whole angelic world, and then stood back a little in blissful trembling reverence, while the Eternal Spirit overshadowed their young queen, and the sweet mystery was accomplished. They envied Michael, the official guardian of the Sacred Humanity, whose zeal devoured his unconsuming spirit even as the zeal of Jesus devoured the Sacred Heart. They envied Raphael, the manlike Angel, the healer and the redeemer, because he was so like to Jesus in his character, and made such beautiful revelations of the pathos there was in God.

But they did not envy Michael or Raphael as they envied the fortunate Gabriel. Oh, how for nine months they hung about the happy Mother, the living tabernacle of the Incomprehensible Creator! Yet none but Gabriel might speak, none but Gabriel float over Joseph in his sleep and whisper to him heavenly words in the thick of his anxious dreams. But when the Little Flower came up from underground, and bloomed visibly in Bethlehem at midnight, and filled the world with sudden fragrance, winter though it was, and dark, and in a sunless cave, then heaven was allowed to open, and their voices and their instruments were given to the Angels, and the floodgates of their impatient jubilee were drawn up, and they were bidden to sing such strains of divinest triumph as the listening earth had never heard before, not even when those same morning stars had sung at its creation, such strains as were meet only for a triumph where the Everlasting God was celebrating the victories of His boundless love. Down into the deep seas flowed the celestial harmony. Over the mountain-tops the billows of the glorious music rolled. The vast vaults of the purple night rung with it in clear liquid resonance. The clouds trembled in its undulations. Sleep waved its wings, and dreams of hope fell upon the sons of men. The inferior creatures were hushed and soothed. The very woods stood still in the night breeze, and the starlit rivers flowed more silently to hear. The flowers distilled double perfumes, as if they were bleeding to death with their unstanched sweetness. Earth herself felt lightened of her load of guilt; and distant worlds, wheeling far off in space, were inundated with the angelic melody. Silent, in impatient adoration, they had leaned over towards earth at the moment of the Incarnation. Silent, and scarce held in by the omnipotent hand of God, they pressed like walls of burning fire around the Cross on Calvary. But at Bethlehem the waters of their inward jubilee burst forth unreproved, and overran all God's creation with the wondrous spells of that Gloria in Excelsis, which is itself, not only a beautiful revelation of angelic nature, but also the worship round the throne made for one moment audible on this low-lying earth. Who does not see that Bethlehem was the predilection of the Angels ?—" Bethlehem," 191-196.

XIV

THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM

From the Angels who sang we pass to the Shepherds who heard their heavenly songs, a simple audience, yet such as does not ill assort with a divine election. We know nothing of their antecedents. We know nothing of what followed their privileged worship of the Babe. They come out of the cloud for a moment. We see them in the starlight of the clear winter night. A divine halo is around them.

They are chosen from among men. Angels speak to them. We hear of the Shepherds themselves speaking to others of the wondrous Babe that they had seen, a King, a concealed King, born in a stable-cave, yet for all that a heavenly King. Then the clouds close over again. The Shepherds disappear. We know no more of them. Their end is as hidden as their beginning was. Yet when a light from God falls upon a man, it betokens something in his antecedents, which heaven has given him, or which has attracted heaven. Those lights do not fall by accident, like the chance sunbeams let through the rents in the pavilion of the clouds, shedding a partial glory with their transient gleams on rock and wood and fern and the many-coloured mosscushioned water-courses, but leaving others in the cold shade that are as beautiful as those which they carelessly illumine. Their early history is as obscure to us as that of Joseph. Nor are they unlike Joseph. They have his hiddenness and his simplicity, without the self-awed majesty of his stupendous office. They were self-possessed, not by the hold which an interior spirit gave them over themselves, but through their extreme simplicity. An angel spoke to them, and they were neither humbled by it, nor elated; they are only afraid of the great light around them. It was as much a matter of course to them. so far as belief in the intelligence, as if some belated peasant neighbour had passed by them on their pastoral watch, and told them some strange news. To simple minds, as to deep ones, everything is its own evidence. They heard the angelic chorus, and were soothed by it, and yet reflected not upon the honour done themselves who were admitted to be its audience. Theirs was the simplicity of a childlike holiness, which does not care to discriminate between the natural and the supernatural. Their restful souls were all life long becalmed in the thought of God.

The faith and promptitude of simplicity are not less heroic than those of wisdom. The shepherds fell not below the Kings in the exercise of these great virtues. But there was less self-consciousness in the promptitude of the Shepherds than in the marvellous docility and swift sacrifice of the Kings. They represent also the place which simplicity occupies in the kingdom of Christ; for, next to that of Mary and Joseph, theirs was the first external worship earth offered to the newborn Babe of Bethlehem.

Simplicity comes very near to God, because boldness is one of its most congenial graces. It comes near, because it is not dreaming how near it comes. It does not think of itself at all, even to realize its own unworthiness; and therefore it hastens when a more self-conscious reverence would be slow; and it is at home, where another kind of sanctity would be waiting for permissions. It is startled sometimes, like a timid fawn, and once startled it is not easily reassured. Such souls are not so much humble as they are simple. The same end is attained in them by a different grace, producing a kindred yet almost a more beautiful holiness. In like manner as simplicity is to them in the place of humility, joy often satisfies in them the claims of adoration. They come to God in an artless way, with a sort of unsuspecting effrontery of love, and when they have come to Him, they simply rejoice, and nothing more. It is their way of adoring Him. It fits in with the rest of their graces; and their simplicity makes all harmonious. There is something almost rustic at times in the way in which such souls take great graces and divine confidences as matters of course, and the Holy Spirit sports with their simplicity and singleness of soul. They are for ever children, and, by an instinct, haunt the sanctuaries of the Sacred Infancy. Their perfection is in truth a mystical

childhood, reflecting, almost perpetuating, the Childhood of our dearest Lord.

How beautifully too is our Lord's attraction to the lowly represented in the call of these rough, childlike, pastoral men! Outside the Cave, He calls the Shepherds first of all. They are men who have lived in the habits of the meek creatures they tend, until their inward life has caught habits of a kindred sort. They lie out at night on the cold mountain-side, or in the chill blue mist of the valley. They hear the winds moan over the earth, and the rude rains beat them during the sleepless night. The face of the moon has become familiar to them, and the silent stars mingle more with their thoughts than they themselves suspect. They are poor and hardy, nursed in solitude, and on scant living, dwellers out of doors and not in the bright cheer of domestic homes.

Such are the men the Babe calls first; and they come as their sheep would come to their own call. They come to worship Him, and the worship of their simplicity is joy, and the voice of jov is praise. God loves the praises of the lowly. There is something grateful to Him in the faith. something confiding in the love, which emboldens the lowly to offer Him the tribute of their praise. He loves also the praises of the gently, meekly happy. Happiness is the temper of holiness; and, if the voice of patient anguish is praise to God, much more is the clear voice of happiness, a happiness that fastens not on created things, but is centred in Himself. They have hardly laid hold of God, who are not supremely happy even in the midst of an inferior and sensible unhappiness. They, whose sunshine is from Him who is within them, worship God brightly out of a blessedness which the world cannot touch, because it gushes upwards from a sanctuary that lies too deep for rifling. Sadness is a sort of spiritual disability. A melancholy man can

never be more than a convalescent in the house of God. He may think much of God, but he worships very little. God has rather to wait upon him as his infirmarian, than he to wait on God as his Father and his King. There is no moral imbecility so great as that of querulousness and sentimentality. Joy is the freshness of our spirits. Joy is the life-long morning of our souls, an habitual sunrise out of which worship and heroic virtue come. Sprightly and grave, swift and self-forgetting, meditative and daring, with its faiths all sights and its hopes all certainties, full of that blessed self-deceit of love that it must give to God more than it receives, and yet for ever finding out with delighted surprise that it is in truth always and only receiving,such is the devotion of the happy man. To the happy man all duties are easy because all duties are new; and they are always done with the freshness and alacrity of novelty. They are like our old familiar woods which, as each day they glisten in the dawn, look each day like a new, unvisited and foreign scene.

But he who lies down at full length on life, as if it were a sick-bed,—poor languishing soul! what will he ever do for God? The very simplicity of the Shepherds would not let them keep their praise a secret to themselves. If there are saints who keep secrets for God's glory, there are saints also whose way of worshipping His glory is to tell the wonders which He has let them see. But such saints must have a rare simplicity for their presiding grace, and this simplicity is a better shield than secrecy. Thus secrecy, which is almost a universal need of souls, is no necessity for them. Hence the Shepherds were the first apostles, the apostles of the Sacred Infancy. The first apostles were shepherds, the second fishermen. Sweet allegory! it is thus that God reveals Himself by His choices, and there are volumes of revelation in each choice.

The figures of the Shepherds have grown to look so natural to us in our thought-pictures of Bethlehem, that it almost seems now as if they were inseparable from it, and indispensable to the mystery. What a beautiful congruity there is between the part they play, and their pastoral occupation! The very contrasts are congruities. Heaven opens, and reveals itself to earth, making itself but one side of the choir to sing the office of the Nativity, while earth is to be the other; and earth's answer to the open heavens is the pastoral gentleness of those simple-minded watchmen. She sets her Shepherds to match the heavenly singers, and counts their simplicity her most harmonious response to angelical intelligence. Truly earth was wise in this her deed, and teaches her sons philosophy. It was congruous too, that simplicity should be the first worship which the outer world sent into the Cave of Bethlehem.

For what is the grace of simplicity but a permanent childhood of the soul, fixed there by a special operation of the Holy Ghost; and therefore a fitting worship for the Holy Child Himself? Their infant-like heavenly-mindedness suited His infantine condition, as well as it suited the purity of the heavenly hosts that were singing in the upper air. Beautiful figures, on whom God's light rested for a moment, and then all was dark again! they were not mere shapes of light, golden imaginings, ideal forms, that filled in the Divine Artist's mysterious picture. They were living souls, tender yet not faultless men, with inequalities in the monotony of their human lot that often lowered them, in temper and in repining, to the level of those around them. They were not so unlike ourselves, though they float in the golden haze of a glorious picture. They fell back out of the strong light unrepiningly, to their sheep-flocks and their night-watches. Their after years were hidden in the pathetic obscurity which is common to all blameless poverty: and

they are hidden now in the sea of light which lies like a golden veil of mist close round the throne of the Incarnate Word.—" Bethlehem," 197-202.

XV

"CAME WISE MEN FROM THE EAST"

A CHANGE comes over the scene, which seems at first sight but little in keeping with the characteristic lowliness of Bethlehem. A cavalcade from the far east comes up this way. The camel bells are tinkling. A retinue of attendants accompanies three Kings of different oriental tribes, who come with their various offerings to the new-born Babe. It is a history more romantic than romance itself would dare to be. Those swarthy men are among the wisest of the studious east. They represent the lore and science of their day. Yet have they done what the world would surely esteem the most foolish of actions. They were men whose science led them to God, men we may be sure of meditative habits, of ascetic lives, and of habitual prayer. The fragments of early tradition and the obscure records of ancient prophecies, belonging to their nations, have been to them as precious deposits which spoke of God and were filled with hidden truth. The corruption of the world, which they as Kings might see from their elevation far and wide, pressed heavily upon their loving hearts. They too pined for a Redeemer, for some heavenly Visitant, for a new beginning of the world, for the coming of a Son of God, for one who should save them from their sins. Their tribes doubtless lived in close alliance; and they themselves were bound together by the ties of a friendship, which the same pure yearnings after greater goodness and higher things cemented.

Never yet had Kings more royal souls. In the dark blue of the lustrous sky there rose a new or hitherto unnoticed star. Its apparition could not escape the notice of these oriental sages, who nightly watched the skies; for their science was also their theology. It was the star of which an ancient prophecy had spoken. Perhaps it drooped low towards earth and wheeled a too swift course, to be like one of the other stars. Perhaps it trailed a line of light after it, slowly yet with visible movement, and so little above the horizon, or with such obvious downward slanting course, that it seemed as if it beckoned to them, as if an angel were bearing a lamp to light the feet of pilgrims, and timed his going to their slowness, and had not shot too far ahead during the bright day, but was found and welcomed each night as a faithful indicator pointing to the Cave of Bethlehem.

How often God prefers to teach by night rather than by day! Meanwhile, doubtless, the instincts of the Holv Spirit in the hearts of these wise rulers drew them towards the star. They followed it as men follow a vocation, hardly seeing clearly at first that they are following a divine lead. Wild and romantic as the conduct of these wise enthusiasts seemed, they did not hesitate. After due counsel they pronounced the luminous finger to be the star of the old prophecy, and therefore God was come. They left their homes, their state, and their affairs, and journeyed westward, they knew not whither, led nightly by the star that slipped onwards in its silent groove. They were the representatives of the heathen world moving forward to the feet of the universal Saviour. They came to the gates of Jerusalem: and there God did honour to His Church. He withdrew the guidance of the star, because now the better guidance of the synagogue was at their command. The oracles of the law pronounced that Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of Messias; and the wise men passed onwards to the humble village. Again the star shone out in the blue heavens, and slowly sank earthward over the Cave of Bethlehem, and presently the devout Kings were at the feet of Jesus. . . .

The grand characteristic of their devotion was its faith. Next to Peter's and to Abraham's there never in the world was faith like theirs. Faith is what strikes us in them at every turn, and faith that was from the first heroic. Had they not all their lives long been out-looking for the Promised One, and what was that but faith? They rested in faith on the old traditions, which their Bedouin or Hindoo tribes had kept. They had utter faith in the ancient prophecies. They had faith in the star when they beheld it, and such faith that no worldly considerations could stand before its face. The star led them on by inland track or by ribbed seashore; but their faith never wavered. It disappeared at Jerusalem, and straightway everything about them was at fault except their faith. The star had gone. Faith sought the synagogue, and acted on the words of the teachers. Faith lighted up the Cave when they entered it, and let them not be scandalized with the scandal of the Cross. They had faith in the warning that came to them by dream, and they obeyed. Faith is the quickest of all learners; for it soon loses itself in that love which sees and understands all things at a glance. How many men think to cure their spiritual ills by increasing their love, when they had better be cultivating their faith! So in this one visit to Bethlehem the Kings learned the whole Gospel, and left the Babe perfect theologians and complete apostles. They taught in their own lands the faith which was all in all to them. They held on through persecution, won souls to Christ, spread memories of Mary, and shed their blood joyously for a faith they felt too cheaply purchased, too parsimoniously requited, by the sternest martyrdom.

We must mark also how detachment went along with faith, detachment from home, from royalty, from popularity, from life itself. So it always is. Faith and detachment are inseparable graces. They are twins of the soul, and grow together, and are so like they can hardly be distinguished, and they live together in such one-hearted sympathy, that it seems as if they had but one life between them, and must needs die together. Detachment is the right grace for the noble, the right grace for the rich, the right grace for the learned. Let us feed our faith, and so shall we become detached. He, who is ever looking with straining eyes at the far mountains of the happy land beyond the sea, cheats himself of many a mile of weary distance; and while the slant columns of white wavering rain are sounding over the treeless moorland, and beating like scourges upon him, he is away in the green sunshine that he sees beyond the gulf, and the storm growls past him as if it felt he was no victim. This is the picture of detachment, forgetting all things in the sweet company of its elder twin-brother, faith. Thus may we say of these three royal sages, that their devotion was one of faith up to seeming folly, as the wise man's devotion always is, of generosity up to romance, and of perseverance up to martyrdom.—"Bethlehem," 202-204, 205, 206,

XVI

SUFFERING, THE LAW OF THE INCARNATION

The law of the Incarnation is a law of suffering. Our Blessed Lord was the man of sorrows, and by suffering He redeemed the world. His Passion was not a mystery detached from the rest of His life, but only the fitting and congruous end of it. Calvary was not unlike Bethlehem

and Nazareth. It exceeded them in degree; it did not differ from them in kind. The whole of the Three-and-Thirty Years was spent in consistent suffering, though it was of various kinds, and not of uniform intensity. This same law of suffering, which belongs to Jesus, touches all who come nigh Him and, in proportion to their holiness, envelops them, and claims them wholly for itself. The Holy Innocents were, in the counsels of God, simply our Lord's contemporaries, but that is similitude enough to plunge them in a sea of suffering, and for His sake their fresh lives must bleed away in their distracted mothers' arms, to be followed by eternal crowns and palms: a happy merchandise, a huge fortune swiftly made, and then so marvellously secured! The same law wound itself round each of the apostles, upon whom the indescribably blessed choice of the Incarnate Word had fallen. It was a cross to Peter and his brother, a sword to Paul, hard stones to James, the flaying knife to Bartholomew, and the boiling oil and the long years of wearisome delay to John. But in whatever shape it came outwardly, inwardly it was always suffering. It went with them into all lands. It overshadowed them in all vicissitudes. It walked with them along the Roman roads, as if it was their guardian angel; it strode by the side of their uneasy galleys on the stormy waters of the Mediterranean. They were apostles. They must be like their Lord. They must enter into the cloud, and the darkness of the eclipse must fall upon them on the top of some Calvary or other, from Rome to Bactria, from Spain to Hindostan. The same law has environed the martyrs of all ages. Their passions have been living shadows of the great Passion, and the blood they shed mingled its kindred stream with the Precious Blood of their Redeemer, the King of Martyrs. So with the saints. Whether they have been bishops or doctors, virgins or matrons, seculars or religious, unusual

love and unusual grace have always reached them in the shape of unusual trial and unusual suffering. They too must be drawn into the cloud, and they will come out of it with their faces shining, because they have seen, and seen closely, the Face of the Crucified. It is so in its measure with all the elect. They must stand at least within the fringes of the dark cloud, or it must overshadow them in transit, perhaps more than once, in order to secure the salvation of their souls by giving them at least an adequate likeness to their Lord. What then must we think of His Mother, who came nighest to Him of all?

It can plainly be no wonder if she shall suffer more than anyone but Himself. The immensity of her sorrows will neither be a distress nor a surprise to us, but rather the obvious conclusion from all we know of the grand mystery of the Incarnation. The amount of her sufferings will be the index of the magnificence of His love for her. The depth of her pains will come the nearest of all things to fathom the abvss of her love for Him. Her far-rolling sea of sorrow will measure the grandeur of her holiness. The loftiness of her divine Maternity will raise her dolours close up to His gracious Passion. Her sinlessness will almost seem to enclose it within the same life-giving law of expiation. Her union with him will render her Compassion inseparable from His Passion, even while for a thousand reasons it is so manifestly distinguishable from it. The Woman clothed with the Sun will be wrapped round and round with the bright darkness of that same terrible destiny, which He vouchsafed first to appoint and then to accept as the great law of His Incarnation. . . .

He who looks over the wide Atlantic sees a waste of waters with a white horizon on every side; but that waste of waters tells nothing either of the multitudinous manifold life which it contains within its bosom, or of the fairy-like

ocean-gardens of vivid painted weeds, its woods of purple, deep thickets of most golden green, grottoes of fantastic rock, with tufted palm-like yellow trees overhanging, and the blue water flowing all round, park-like vistas of glossy, spotted, arborescent herbs, or leagues on leagues of rose-coloured forests teeming with strange, beautiful, heretofore unimaginable life. So is it with the sea of sorrows which rolls over the secret depths of the Immaculate Heart of the Mother of God.—"The Foot of the Cross," 3-5, 6, 7.

XVII

THE PROPHECY OF SIMEON

FORTY days had gone since the angels sang at midnight. Mary and Joseph had been deep down all the while in divine mysteries. The shepherds had worshipped the newborn Babe. The three kings had laid their mystic offerings at His feet, and the new star had melted away in the purple of the nocturnal skies. The world had gone upon its road as usual. Every morning there was political news in Rome, every morning philosophical discussions in the schools of The caravans went in and out of the gates of the white Damascus, and the sun shone on the bend of the Orontes at Antioch. The imperial officials made up their books and lists at Bethlehem, and Joseph and Mary were items in the account of the provincial taxation. In the common course of things, and according to the law, on the first of January Jesus for the first time had shed His blood. How much had passed since the twenty-fifth of December. Since that day the Creator had been visible in His own creation, though it was almost underground, in a kind of grotto or natural stable for kine. Now the second of February was come. Joseph and Mary, with the Child, leave the spot where those Forty Days have fled as swiftly as a heavenly vision. They wind round the skirt of the narrow hill whereon the city is built. The pruned vine-yards on the steeps have scarcely yet begun to weep their vernal tears where the knife has wounded them. But the cornfields where Ruth gleaned are green, and the clear sunshine of early spring is on the grey rocks by Rachel's tomb. The roofs of the Holy City are in sight, with the glorious temple shining above all. To that temple, His own temple, the visible Infant God was now going.

Mary had spent twelve years of her sinless life in the courts of the temple. It was there that she had outwardly dedicated her virginity to God, which she had vowed in the first moment of her Immaculate Conception. It was there she meditated over the ancient scriptures, and learned the secrets of the Messias. She was coming back to it again, still virgin, yet, mystery of grace! a mother with a child. She came to be purified, who was purer than the untrodden snow on Lebanon. She came to present her child to God. and do for the Creator what no creature but herself could do, give Him a gift fully equal to Himself. When the second temple was built, the ancients of the people lifted up their voices and wept, because its glory was not equal to the glory of the first; but the first temple had never seen such a day as that which was now dawning on the temple of Herod. The glory of the Holv of Holies was but a symbol of the real glory which Mary was now bearing thitherward in her arms. But she had two offerings with her. She bore one, and Joseph the other. She bore her Child, and he the pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons, for her purification. Many saw them pass. But there was nothing singular in them, nothing especially attractive to the eyes of the beholders. So it always is, where God is. Now that He is visible, He is in truth, except to faith and love, just as invisible as He ever was. . . .

Mary made her offerings, and "performed all things according to the law of the Lord." For the spirit of Jesus was a spirit of obedience; and, although the brightness of angelic innocence was dull beside the whiteness of her purity, she obeyed the law of God in the ceremony of her purification, the more readily as it was in fact a concealment of her graces. But she bore also in her arms her true turtledove, to do for Him likewise "according to the custom of the law." She placed Him in the arms of the aged priest, Simeon, as she has done since in vision to so many of the saints: and the full light broke on Simeon's soul. Weak with age he threw his arms around his God. He bore the whole weight of his Creator, and yet stood upright. The sight of that Infant Face was nothing less than the glory of heaven. The Holy Ghost had kept His promise. Simeon had seen, nay, was at that moment handling, "the Lord's Christ." O blessed priest! worn down with age, wearied with thy long years of waiting for the "consolation of Israel," kept alive in days which were out of harmony with thy spirit, even as St. John the Evangelist was after thee, surely He who made thee, He who is so soon to judge thee, He whom thou art folding so fondly in thine arms, must have sent the strength of His omnipotence into thy heart, else thou wouldst never have been able to bear the flood of strong gladness which at that moment broke in upon thy spirit! Look at Him again. See those red lips so soon to speak thy sentence of eternal life. Light thy heart at the fire of those little eyes. It is the Christ! Oh, how much prophecy is fulfilled! The history of the world is finding its accomplishment. The crown is being put upon creation. The long secular yearnings of patriarchs, and kings, and prophets,-they were all after the beauty of that Infant

Face. Thou hast seen the Christ. Everything is in that word. The sight was heaven. Earth has nothing more to do with thee. It had best roll itself away from under thy feet as quickly as possible, and let thee drop into the infinite Bosom of thy Father, the beauty of whose Son may kill thee by the gentlest and most beautiful of deaths.

It is hard for him to part with that sweet burden from his arms. In that extreme old age the vents of song have been opened in his soul, and in the silence of the temple he sings his Nunc Dimittis, even as Zachary sang his Benedictus, and Mary her Magnificat. Age after age shall take up the strain. All the poetry of Christian weariness is in it. It gives a voice to the heavenly detachment and unworldliness of countless saints. It is the heart's evening light, after the working hours of the day, to millions and millions of believers. The very last compline that the Church shall sing, before the midnight when the doom begins and the Lord breaks out upon the darkness from the refulgent east, shall overflow with the melodious sweetness of Simeon's pathetic song. Joseph was wrapt even then in an ecstasy of holy admiration. Even Mary "wondered" at the words, so deep, so beautiful, so true; for she knew, as no others knew, how marvellously her Babe was of a truth the light of all the world. And when in her humility she knelt for the blessing of the aged priest, had he Jesus in his arms still when he blessed her, and did he wave the Child above her in the sign of the cross, like a Christian Benediction, or had she Jesus in her arms, holding Him at His own creature's feet, to get a blessing? Either way, how wonderful the mystery! But what a strange blessing for thee, happy sinless Mother! There is other poetry in Simeon than those strains of light which flashed from him but awhile ago. There is other music now for Mary's ear, the terrible music of dark prophecy which the Holy Ghost utters from His sanctuary in the old priest's heart; and we would fain think that Simeon held Jesus in his arms when he uttered it, by the very way in which he begins. "Behold this Child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed."

Simeon was silent. But over Mary's soul there came an inexplicable change. Perhaps she learned now what she had not known before. But more probably it only came to her then in another way. Yet it was a change, an operation of grace, a new sanctification, an immense work of God. A clear and detailed vision of all her sorrows, especially of the whole Passion, was with its minutest circumstances instantaneously impressed upon her soul; and her immaculate heart was deluged with a sea of sorrow, which was supernatural both in its kind and its intensity. It seemed as if the vision came from the very face of Jesus, as if His eyes looked it into her and engraved it there. She saw His own Heart all unveiled, with all its inward dispositions. It was as if the Incarnation had come upon her again, and in a different way. She was raised to fresh heights of holiness. She entered upon another vast region of her appanage as the Mother of God. She was the same Mary and yet a different one, who but awhile ago had entered the temple. But there was no surprise with this portentous change. No starting, no weak tremor, no fluttering of the spirit. Her unshaken peace grew more peaceful, because of the world of bitterness that had gone down into it. The Light of the World had flashed up on high in Simeon's arms, in Simeon's song, and there followed darkness, deeper, thicker, more palpable, than that of Egypt. Suddenly, out of the sunshine of Bethlehem, she found herself in the heart of the eclipse on Calvary; and she was calm as before,

with unastonished dignity, with the tranquillity of unutterable love, with the strength of divinest union, and with the sword right through her broken heart, which should remain there for eight-and-forty years, and then when Jesus should draw it out of the wound, she would bleed to death with love.

She heard Anna come into the temple, and acknowledge Jesus as her God. She heard the words the aged prophetess spoke about Him to those there who "looked for the redemption of Israel." She was careful that the least things which the law ordained should be obediently fulfilled; and then, with Joseph and the Child, she wended her wav back to the green hollow of Galilee, to the steep sloping streets of the sequestered Nazareth, with the sword, that sharp sword of the Holv Ghost, within her heart. Since she left her home in December, how much has passed! But the sunset looks on Nazareth, gilding its white cottages, as though all things had gone on the same from the beginning. Oh, how cruel unchanging nature looks to a heart that has been changed in its own despite !- "The Foot of the Cross," 70-72, 73-76.

XVIII

SIMEON AND ANNA

How God always gives more than He promises! Simeon did not only see the Christ, but was allowed to take Him up in his arms, and doubtless to print a kiss of trembling reverence upon the Creator's human lips. How else could his lips have ever sung so beautiful a song, a song so sunsetlike that one might believe all the beauty of all earth's beautiful evenings since creation had gone into it, to fill it full of peaceful spells? He was old for a poet; but his age had not dried or drained his heart.

The infirm old man held bravely in his arms the strength of the Omnipotent. He held up the light of the world on high in the midst of His own temple, just before he himself was lost in the inaccessible light of a glorious eternity. His weak eyes, misty with age and dim with tears, looked into the deep eyes of the Babe of Bethlehem, and to his faith they were fountains of eternal light. This was the vision that he had been seeing all his life long. He had wept over the drooping fortunes of Israel, but much more over the shepherdless wanderings of the souls of his dear countrymen. But he had ever seen through his tears; as we may see through a thick storm of rain, waving like a ponderous curtain to and fro, while the wind is slowly ungrawing it, a green mountain, bright and sun-stricken, with patches of illuminated yellow corn upon its sides, and strips of green ferny moorland, and jutting knolls of purple heather, and the wet silvery shimmering on the roofs of men's dwellings.

Now the evening of life was come. The rain was passed away, and the Lord's mountain came out, not bright and radiant only, but so astonishingly near that he might have thought his eyes were but deceiving him. But no! the face of Jesus was close to his. Heaven had come to him on earth. It was the heaven of his own choosing. Strange lover of his land and people! he had preferred to see Jesus on earth, and so be sure that now poor Israel might possess Him, rather than have gone long since by an earlier death to have seen the Word through the quiet dimness of Abraham's Bosom. Was it not the loveliest of mysteries to see those arms, that were shaking and unsteady with long lapse of time, so fondly enfolding the ever-young eternity of God? Was it not enough for Simeon ? Oh, was it not unspeakably more than enough? As nightingales are said to have sung themselves to death, so Simeon died, not of the sweet weariness of his long watching, but of the fulness of his contentment, of the satisfaction of his desires, of the very new youth of soul which the touch of the Eternal Child had infused into his age, and breaking forth into music which heaven itself might envy and could not surpass, he died with his world-soothing song upon his lips. . . .

But besides this long preparation for a momentary and subordinate appearance in a divine mystery, we must observe also how God often comes to men in their old age. They have lived for that which only comes when real life seems past. What a divine meaning there is in all this! The significance of a whole life often comes uppermost only in the preparation for death. Our destiny only begins to be fulfilled, after it appears to have been worked out. Who knows what he is intended for? What we have dreamed was our mission is of all things the least likely to have been such. For missions are divine things, and therefore generally hidden, generally unconsciously fulfilled. If there are some who seem to have done their work early, and then live on we know not why, there are far more who do their real work later on, and not a few who only do it in the act of dying. Nay, is it not almost so in natural things? Life for the most part blooms only once, and like the aloe it blooms late.

Neither must we fail to note under what circumstances it is God's habit to come to these hidden souls. The devotion of Simeon and Anna is eminently a devotion of prayer and church-frequenting. In other words, God comes to holy souls, not so much in heroic actions, which are rather the soul's leaping upward to God, but in the performance of ordinary, habitual devotions, and the discharge of modest, unobtrusive duties, made heroic by long perseverance and inward intensity. How much matter for thought is there in all these reflections; and in divine things what is matter for thought is matter for practice also! Thus, if the angelic

song was the opening of heaven before our eyes, this apparition of Simeon and Anna is the opening beneath our feet of an exquisite hidden world, a realm of subterranean angels, a secret abyss of human hearts in which God loves to hide Himself, a region of evening calmness and of twilight tranquillity, a world of rest and yet of power, heated with the whole day's sunshine and giving forth its fragrance to the cooling dews, a world which not only teaches us much, but consoles us also, yet leaves us pensive (for does not consolation always leave us so?) casting over us a profitable spiritual shadow, like the melancholy in which a beautiful sunset so often steeps the mind, breeding more loving thoughts of others, and in ourselves a more contented lowliness.

The lake lies smooth and motionless in the quiet light of evening. The great mountains with their bosses of mottled crag protruding through the green turf, and the islets with their aerial pines, are all imaged downwards in the pellucid waters. Even the heron that has just gone to roost on the dead branch is mirrored there. The faintly rosy sky between the tops of the many-fingered firs is reflected there, as if it were fairy fretwork in the mere. But upon you promontory of rock a little blameless boy, afraid of the extreme tranquillity, or angry with it, or to satisfy some impulsive restlessness within him, has thrown a stone into the lake, and that fairy world, that delicate creation, is instantly broken up and fled. So is it with that spiritual world of placid beauty, which we have been contemplating in the worship of Simeon and Anna.-" Bethlehem," 210, 211, 214-216.

XIX

THE HOLY INNOCENTS

Wно does not know those plaintive sounds, sad in themselves but sadder in their circumstances, which can sometimes extinguish even the shining of bright light, making one sense master another, like the cry of the lapwing among ruins? So is it with us now. Like silent apparitions, Simeon and Anna pass away. We hear loud voices and shrill expostulations, as of women in misery talking all at once, like a jargon in the summer woods when the birds have risen against the hawk, and then the fearful cry of excited lamentation, with the piteous moaning of the infant victims mingled with the inconsolable wailing of their brave, powerless mothers. It is the massacre of the Holv Innocents. Yet even this dismal scene is a scene of worship. Tragic as it is, it has a quiet side, and a beauty which, blood-stained though it be, is not unbecoming to the meek majesty of Bethlehem. Alas! how the anguish of those mothers, that were so inconsiderate to her who was on the point of becoming a mother like themselves, and how the wrathful but more silent misery of the fathers, is expiating in its own streets the inhospitality of Bethlehem.

But those little ones are mighty saints of God, and their infant cries were a most articulate revelation of many of His mysterious ways. The apparent contradiction that innocence should do penance is one of the primary laws of the Incarnation. The Infant Saviour Himself began it. It was involved in the state of humiliation in which he came. It was part of the pathos of a fallen world. But none shared it with Him at Bethlehem, except the Holy Innocents. To Mary He brought a new access of heavenly joy, and when the tender hand of Simeon was nerved by

the Holy Ghost to plant in her heart the first of the seven swords she was to bear, it was the untimely woe of Calvary that pierced her soul, and not the penances of Bethlehem: To Joseph the joy the Infant brought was yet more unmingled. The Baptist leaped with exultation in his mother's womb, when the Babe came near. The Angels sang because the mystery was full of jubilee. To the Shepherds it was good tidings of great joy, and to the Kings contentment and delight. To Simeon and Anna also He came as light, and peace, and satisfaction, and jubilee. His brightness had made earth so dull, that all which was left them now was speedily to die. But the Holy Innocents joined their infant cries with His. To them the glad Christmas and the singing Angels brought but blood and death. They were the first martyrs of the Word, and their guilt was His,-that they were born in Bethlehem. . . .

These infant martyrs represent also what must in its measure befall every one who draws near to Jesus. Suffering goes out of Him, like an atmosphere. The air is charged with the seed of crosses, and the soul is sown all over with them before it is aware. Moreover the cross is a quick growth, and can spring up, and blossom, and bear fruit almost in a night, while from its vivacious root a score of fresh crosses will spring up and cover the soul with the peculiar verdure of Calvary. They that come nearest to our Lord are those who suffer most, and who suffer the most unselfishly. With His use of reason He could have spoken and complained; so might the Innocents, but they worshipped only with their cries. One moment they were made aware of the full value of their dear lives, and the next moment they were of their own accord to give them up, and not to let their newly-given reason plead, but even to hide it with the cries of unreasoning infancy. Never were martyrs placed under so peculiar a trial. How well they

teach the old lesson, that unselfishness is its own reward; and that to hold our tongues about our wrongs is to create a new fountain of happiness within ourselves, which only needs the shade of secrecy to be perennial! If they paid dear for the honour of being the fellow-townsmen of our Lord, how magnificent were the graces which none but He could have accumulated in that short moment, and which He gave to them with such a regal plenitude! To be near Jesus was the height of happiness, yet it was also both a necessity and a privilege of suffering. We cannot spare the Holy Innocents from the beautiful world of Bethlehem. Next to Mary and Joseph, we could take them away least of all. Without them we should read the riddle of the Incarnation wrong, by missing many of its deepest laws. They are symbols to us of the necessities of nearness to our Lord. They are the living laws of the vicinity of Jesus. Softened through long ages, the mothers' cries and the children's moans come to us almost as a sad strain of music, sweeter than it is sad, sweet even because it is so sad, the moving elegy of Bethlehem.—"Bethlehem," 216, 217, 220, 221,

XX

SAINT LUKE

THERE is still another presence in the Cave of Bethlehem, which is a type of devotion to the Sacred Infancy. Deep withdrawn into the shade, so as to be scarcely visible, stands one who is gazing on all the mysteries with holy amazement and tenderest rapture. He takes no part in any of them. His attitude is one of mute observance. He is like one of those shadowy figures, which painters sometimes introduce

into their pictures, rather as suggesting something to the beholder than as historically part of the action represented. It is St. Luke, the "beloved physician" of St. Paul, and the first Christian painter. He forms a type of worship by himself, and must not be detached from the other eight, though he was out of time with them. To us he is an essential feature of Bethlehem. The Holy Ghost had elected him to be the historiographer of the Sacred Infancy. Without him we should have known nothing of the Holy Childhood, except the startling visit of the three heathen Kings, which was so deeply impressed on St. Matthew's Hebrew imagination, together with the massacre of the Innocents and the flight into Egypt, which were the consequences of that visit, and so part of the one history. In the vision of inspiration the Holy Ghost renewed to him the world of Bethlehem, and the sweet spiritual pageantry of all its gentle mysteries. To him, the first artist of the Church, we fitly owe the three songs of the Gospel, the Magnificat, the Benedictus, and the Nunc Dimittis. He was as much the Evangelist of the Sacred Infancy, as St. John was the Evangelist of the Word's Divinity, or St. Matthew and St. Mark of the active life of our Blessed Lord.

He represents the devotion of artists, and the posture of Christian art at the feet of the Incarnate Saviour. Christian art, rightly considered, is at once a theology and a worship; a theology which has its own method of teaching, its own ways of representation, its own devout discoveries, its own varying opinions, all of which are beautiful so long as they are in subordination to the mind of the Church. What is the Blessed John of Fiesole's Life of Christ but, next to St. Thomas, the most magnificent treatise on the Incarnation which was ever conceived or composed? No one can study it without learning new truths each time. It gives up slowly and by degrees to the loving eye the rich treasures of

a master-mind, full of depth, and tenderness, and truth, and heavenly ideal. It is a means of grace which sanctifies us as we look upon it, and melts us into prayer.

Of a truth art is a revelation from heaven, and a mighty power for God. It is a merciful disclosure to men of His more hidden beauty. It brings out things in God which lie too deep for words, things which words must needs make heresies, if they try to speak them. In virtue of its heavenly origin it has a special grace to purify men's souls, and to unite them to God by first making them unearthly. If art debased is the earthliest of things, true art, not unmindful that it also, like our Lord, was born in Bethlehem and cradled with Him there, is an influence in the soul, so heavenly that it almost seems akin to grace. It is a worship too as well as a theology. From what abvss rose those marvellous forms upon the eye of John of Fiesole, except from the depths of prayer? Have we not often seen the divine Mother and her Blessed Child so depicted that it was plain they never were the fruit of prayer, and do we not instinctively condemn them even on the score of art, without directly adverting to religious feeling? The temper of art is a temper of adoration. Only a humble man can paint divine things grandly. His types are delicate and easily missed, shifting under the least pressure and bending unless handled softly. An artist, who is not joined to God, may work wonders of genius with his pencil and colours; but the heavenly spirit, the essence of Christian art, will have evaporated from his work. It may remain to future generations as a trophy of anatomy, and a triumph of peculiar colouring; but it will not remain as a source of holiest inspiration to Christian minds, and an ever-flowing fountain of the glory of God. It may be admired in the gallery; it would offend over the altar. Theology and devotion both owe a heavy debt to art, but it is as parents owe debts to

their loving children. They take as gifts what came from themselves, and they love to consider that what is due to them by justice is rather paid to them out of the spontaneous generosity of love. St. Luke is the type and symbol of this true art, which is the child of devotion and theology; and it is significant that he is thus connected with the world of Bethlehem.

The characteristics, which have been noticed in his Gospel, seem to be most congenial to his vocation. Our Lord's life is everywhere the representation of the beautiful; but in none of its mysteries is it a more copious fountain of art than in those of His Sacred Infancy; and it is these which inspiration has especially loved to disclose to St. Luke's predilection. A painter is a poet also, and hence his Gospel is the treasury in which the Christian canticles, all of them canticles of the Sacred Infancy, are laid up and embalmed for the delight and consolation of all time. The preservation of them was a natural instinct of an artistic mind, which was already fitted to receive a bidding of inspiration so congenial to itself. He was a physician as well as a painter, and there is something kindred in the spirit of the two occupations. The quick eve, the observant gentleness, the appreciation of character, the seizing of the actual circumstances, the genial spirit, the minute attentiveness, the sympathizing heart, the impressionableness to all that is soft, and winning, and lovely, and weak, and piteous, all these things belong to the true physician as well as to the true artist. Hence has it come to pass that the physician of the body has so often been the physician of the soul as well. That which is truly artistic in him makes him a kind of priest; and what above all things are priests, artists, and physicians, but angelic ministers to human sorrow, ministers of love and not of fear, vested with a pathetic office of consolation which, strange to say, seems the more

tender and unselfish because it is official. Thus St. Luke is noted for his instinct for souls. His Gospel has been named the Gospel of mercy, because it is so full of incidents of our Lord's love of sinners. It is from him chiefly that we have the conversions of sinners, and the examples of our Lord's amazing kindness to them, or we may say rather of His positive attraction to them, like the physician's attraction to the sick, to use the figure which He Himself vouchsafed to use in order to justify Himself for this compassionate propensity. After Mary, Luke is the beginner of the devotion to the Precious Blood, whose apparently indiscriminate abundance and instantaneous absolving power he so artfully magnifies in his beautiful Gospel. It is a Gospel of sunshine. It throws strong light into the darkest places, and loves to use the power it has to do so: and is not all this painter-like? The examples to which the fallen sinner turns instinctively, when hope and despair are battling for his soul, are mostly in the Gospel of St. Luke. He chose what he most loved himself; and inspiration ministered to the bent of his genius, rather than diverted or ignored it. He is known, like all artists, by his choice of subjects. What wonder he was the dear companion of St. Paul, when their minds were so congenial! The magnifying of grace, the facility and abundance of redemption. the vast treasures of hope, the delight of reconciliation with God, the predilection for the grand phenomena of conversion, all these peculiarities of St. Luke's genius would recommend him to the apostle of the Precious Blood, and would also give him swift admission to the intimacy of Mary.

It was perhaps through her that the Holy Ghost revealed to him the mysteries of Bethlehem. To John she spake of the Eternal Generation of the Word, to Luke of Nazareth and Bethlehem, of the Angels and the Shepherds, and the

Gospel Songs. For devotion to Mary is an inalienable inspiration of Christian art, and it is akin also to devotion to the Babe of Bethlehem. Luke, with the painter's licence, gazed into Mary's face, as none other but the Infant Jesus had ever gazed into it. He read the mysteries of Bethlehem depicted there. He drank the spirit of the Sacred Infancy in the fountains of her eyes. He lived with the Mother of Mercy, until he saw nothing but mercy in her Son. The image in his heart, which was the model of all other images, was the countenance of the divine Mother. His idea of Jesus was His marvellous likeness to Mary, likeness not in features only, but in office and in soul. Thus was the spirit of beauty within him instinctively drawn to Bethlehem, just as Bethlehem has been the most queenly attraction of holy art ever since. Then, when he comes to our Lord's public life and His intercourse with men, it is just such manifestations of His Sacred Heart as are the most congenial to the spirit of the Sacred Infancy, which his predilection chooses for his written portrait of the Incarnate Word. Let us place him then in the Cave of Bethlehem, withdrawn into the shadow, and looking out from thence with the boldness of his tender eyes upon the mysteries around Him. He is there by the appointment of the Holy Ghost, as the painter of Mary, and the secretary of the Infant Jesus.—"Bethlehem," 221-226.

XXI

THE CIRCUMCISION

To the Heart of Jesus, already enamoured of sorrow and suffering, seven days were enough for the tranquil joys of Bethlehem, joys over whose tranquillity the shadow of

Calvary was already cast. The stainless Mother had only one short octave of the Precious Blood for her own delight. She knew its mission and its mystery. She saw it in the almost transparent vase of the Infant Body. She saw the pulses of its life beat with all the natural rapidity of childhood. Through the veil of snowy skin she saw its purple streams. From time to time she saw it mantle in His face, and flush His little cheek. She saw its coral upon those tiny lips, over which were to flow the words of everlasting life, and also the awful judgments of uncounted millions of human souls. In the still night she heard its throbbing, and adored the mysteries of that busy sleep, the secrets of that silent Heart. When she clasped Him to her breast, she felt the beatings of the Precious Blood, and knew that it was the harmless force of the vast omnipotence, which had with such sweet craft imprisoned itself in the frailty and the littleness of a new-born Babe. She knew it was that Blood which the justice of the Father sought after. She knew how lovingly and how severely His sanctity thirsted for its shedding. She was awe-struck with the thoughts which crowded upon her; and yet, those amazing thoughts, how full of joyousness they were! She knew the temper of that dear blood, and bore with its impatience, an impatience which love might have deemed unreasonable; only that the love of Jesus is the adoration of Him also. He had hastened the time of His coming, because of the loveliness of Mary. He had been impatient even in heaven. Now He had come into her arms. He had looked in her eyes but seven short days. How much the two silences of the Mother and the Son had to say to each other! Could He not rest a while? Need He begin redeeming all at once? Nay, He cannot redeem yet. There are Three-and-Thirty years to be spent before that, crowded with the fulfilment of numerous eternal purposes. No! He cannot rest. He

could not rest in His Father's Bosom. He cannot rest in His Mother's arms. His rest is in the shedding of His Blood. Let the Child shed His Blood, and then He will be content to rest; and so He shed it in the Circumcision, being yet but eight days old. . . .

Perhaps too this mystery was also very specially for St. Joseph. It was his Calvary. He saw no more of the Passion, except that it was shown him mystically, and that, after the fashion of the saints, he was perhaps made partaker of its mysteries and inward stigmata. Otherwise he saw the Precious Blood no more, until the morning of Easter. Joseph counted for much in the plans of God. He shared all or most of those Mary-haunting years at Nazareth, when the whole wide world without had but a three years' Ministry bestowed upon it. Doubtless many mysteries of the early years of Jesus were meant singularly for St. Joseph. This Circumcision was his one mystery of the Precious Blood. It begins each year for us. It is our New Year's Day. It braids upon the front of every coming year of life the Name of Jesus, our life's dear Lord, and it braids it in those red snowdrops of His Infancy, the first blossoms of His Precious Blood .- "The Precious Blood," 212, 213, 214.

XXII

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

THE Flight into Egypt has always been a fountain of poetry and art in the Church at large, while it has been a source of tears and of rich contemplation to religious souls. It is not only that the mystery is so exceedingly beautiful in itself; but the Gentiles have loved to regard it as, after the

Epiphany, the beginning of our Lord's dealings with them. He flies from His own people to take refuge in a heathen land. He consecrates by His presence that very land which had been the great historical enemy of the chosen people, and which was, as it were, the express type of all heathen darkness. Amid those benighted Gentiles He finds a peaceful home, where no persecutions trouble the even tenor of His childish life. The idols fall from their niches, as He moves. A power goes out into the rich Nile-valley, nay, overflows it, and runs far into the yellow sands of the desert, sanctifying and setting apart the whole region as a future Church, as a blossoming wilderness, as a barren mystical paradise populous with saints. The fathers of the desert are to pass into a Christian proverb throughout the magnificent west, a phenomenon which men will never be weary of admiring, a living discipline, an enduring academy, in which all future generations of Catholic saints are to be brought up and to take their degrees. . . .

The night was dark and tranquil over the little town of Nazareth, when Joseph went forth. No commandment of God ever found such promptitude in highest saint or readiest angel as this one had found in Mary. She heard Joseph's words, and she smiled on him in silence as he spoke. There was no perturbation, no hurry, although there was all a mother's fear. She took up her treasure as He slept, and went forth with Joseph into the cold starlight; for poverty has few preparations to make. She was leaving home again. Terror and hardship, the wilderness and heathendom, were before her; and she confronted all with the calm anguish of an already broken heart. Here and there the night-wind stirred in the leafless fig-trees, making their bare branches nod against the bright sky, and now and then a watch-dog bayed, not because it heard them, but from the mere nocturnal restlessness of animals. But as Jesus had come

like God, so He went like God, unnoticed and unmissed. No one is ever less missed on earth than He on whom it all depends. . . .

Ages ago the Jewish people, after their deliverance from Egypt, had wandered over that desert. Its grey sands, its ruddy rocks, its stone-strewn plains, its regions of scant verdure, its sea-coast, and its wells of pastoral renown, had been the scenes of such wonders as the world had not beheld before. Never had the Creator interfered so visibly, or for so long a time together, in favour of His creatures. The whole camp, with its cloud and fire, its cruciform march, with Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasses, bearing the relics of Joseph, its moving church beautified with the spoils of Egypt, was a standing miracle. In Sinai God had thundered from the heights, pouring through that wandering Hebrew people over the whole world the glorious light and transcending faith of the unity of God, a doctrine that came to the world most fitly from the austere grandeur of a wilderness. There had those commandments of heavenly morality been given, under which we are living at the present day, and which shall be men's rule of life until the doom, the Judge's rule in fixing the doom of each. In our Christian childhood we have wandered with the Jews over that silent wilderness. learning the fear of God. In their pilgrimage we have seen a type of our own. In their vicissitudes we seemed almost to take part ourselves. The very names of the wells and halting-places sound like old songs in our ears, songs so early learned that they can never be forgotten. Here now was the very Creator Himself, in the reality of human childhood, wandering over that historic wilderness, reversing the Exodus, going to make Egypt His home, driven out of the delectable land of the old Canaanites by the very people whom He had led thither by a pillar of light, whose battles He had fought, whose victories He had gained, and whose

tribes He had established, each in its characteristic and suitable allotment. There was Mary with her Magnificat, instead of Miriam and her glorious seaside song; and another Joseph, greater and dearer far than that saintly patriarch of old, who had saved the lives of men by husbanding the bread of Egypt, whereas this new Joseph was to guard in the same Egypt the living Bread of everlasting life. And that very wilderness both the Josephs had crossed.

How wonderful must have been the thoughts of Jesus and Mary as they wandered over those scenes of God's past mercies, past judgments, past grandeurs! We may reverently follow them in our meditations, but it would be hardly reverent to write our guesses down. It was a journey of hardship and fatigue. At last they reached the shores of the Red Sea, and saw the waters that lay between Egypt and themselves. We can hardly conceive that they did not as it were re-consecrate by their presence the exact scene of the Exodus, wherever it was. Thence it would be most likely that they would follow the coast, and round the gulf by Suez, and so pass on to Heliopolis, now truly, for some years to come, to be the City of the Sun. Tradition speaks of trees that bowed down their leafy heads, inclining their branchless stems, to shade with their fanlike plumes the Mother and the Child. It speaks also of the uncouth images of the heathen gods which tumbled, like Dagon. from their pedestals, when the true God went by. There on the banks of that old river where Moses wrought his miracles, amid crowds of benighted idolaters, and in all the straitnesses of poverty, the Hebrew strangers dwelt, for seven years, for five years, or for two years and a half, as different authorities maintain. Joseph pursued his trade of carpenter, and Mary doubtless contributed to the support of the modest household, while Jesus unfolded His infantine

beauties day after day, more delicate and lovely a thousand times in His human loveliness, than the fairest snowy lotus that was ever cradled on the bosom of the Nile.—"The Foot of the Cross," 104, 105, 106, 108-110.

XXIII

THE INFANT GOD

Let us take an imaginary scene in which to contemplate the Divinity of the Babe of Bethlehem. Let us hasten into the wilderness where there are the fewest real images of creatures to distract us, and those of the most placid kind. and in themselves, as well as because of their fewness, full of thoughts which lead to God. Thither we can summon all the creatures of the universe to adorn and illustrate the glorious attributes of the Infant God. Our Lady and St. Joseph are in the very heart of the desert on their flight into Egypt, wearv yet less anxious now that Palestine is left so far behind. It is in itself an astonishing mystery, the Creator flying from His own creatures, and in such helpless guise. Two creatures only are with Him, to wait upon His created nature; and those two are of such exceeding holiness as to be the wonders of creation not only till the end of time, but for ever. We will suppose a pair of thin-foliaged acacia-trees, islanded as it were in the desert scene, a well between them, with a marge of faint verdure, and some of the grey aromatic desert plants creeping over it, and all around nothing but a shining extent of tawny sand, outspread like an interminable lion's skin. Mary lays the Child gently on the dry sand under such shade as the acacia affords, near to the edge of the well, while the sun is sloping to its setting, so near that the risen moon is momentarily

filling with distinctive light. Let us draw near in spirit to adore.

As we gaze upon Him, we are struck by His likeness to His Mother. That likeness is one of His veils; also, well considered, one of His disclosures too, disclosing the reality of His Mother's grandeur, disclosing also that Divinity which she resembles, in whose image man was originally created, and no man such an image of it as He, because all others were but images of His created nature, images of God through Him. So that even the human Face of Jesus was unspeakably divine.

What can be more weak and helpless than that little weary Child, in whose first months this hard pilgrimage to Egypt has to be endured? Yet both that weakness and that weariness are full of mysteries. In His weakness faith sees His omnipotence. That little one is boundless, boundless as an unimaginable sea, and what awful might does not such immensity suppose? We are obliged to call His power by the name of power, because we have no other word to express that sovereignty which our highest ideas of power dishonour rather than rightly estimate. It is something which can reach strange, nameless heights beyond the region of any intelligible miracles. It implies unthinkable depths and possibilities of facile, gigantic, indefinable energy, all lying as it were coiled up in that handful of human life, that tiny burden of swaddling-clothes upon the sand. He is weary because He has been carried all day, poor uncomplaining Babe, hunted by men as if He were some beautiful wild beast of the wilderness, whom they were eager to slay for the loveliness of his spoils. He has been for hours helpless and cramped in the bandages that swathed Him, and His limbs ache with the monotonous posture.

Yet not the less, rather all the more, we recognise Him as the strong, unfatigued Creator, who built the mountains anchored the seas, lighted the volcanoes, and is at that moment making the crust of the great and ever-quaking earth undulate, like a poplar in the wind, or an uncut hay-field in the breath of the sunrise. He it is who sent the swift stars on their rushing courses, and built the ponderous worlds out of an ever-fluent web of weightless elements, and is now undistractedly attending to all those things as He lies upon the sand. It is He, to take but one instance from nature's least important provinces, who is at that moment thoughtfully, considerately, specially, proportionately ministering to every atom of phosphoric life in all the transitory, heaving, moon-sparkling hollows of the liquid sea.

Sleep comes over Him, as He lies upon the sand. What a wonder also is His sleep! He is the Unbeginning Eternal. He was an eternity old before creation began, and has never known vicissitude. Yet to His creatures' eyes He has had a grand everlasting life of portentous changes, which yet stir not His adorable immutability. To Him what a mysterious mutation is the shadowy spell of sleep, which takes the light of His eyes captive so swiftly and so stealthily, His infantine weakness succumbing to its approach! He has shut His eyes to the sunset, and is in the dark. Yet there is no night to Him. We know Him best as unapproachable light. Were God,—do not look up to heaven, but on that little Slumberer beneath the acacia branches, were God to close His eyes in sleep one instant, all created life would perish utterly. All matter and spirit would rush together, and cease to be, and time and space be buried in the instantaneous universal grave of things. Yet look how closely the eyelids are drawn down, how regularly the bosom lifts itself in little heavings, how more and more audible the deeper breathings are! God is really asleep.

He wakes and weeps. He wakes, the intermission of whose vigilance is impossible. He weeps who is illimitable,

uncreated joy. All pleasures, that we can think or name, or think further than we can name, vast, deep, rich, unutterable, steadfast, ungrowing, are in Him, or rather He is a gladness beyond them all. In truth the very perfecttions of all conceivable joys would be imperfections in His jov, and detractions from His blessedness. Look at the little bird sipping from the huge sheet of an American lake, then back to its nest in the silver fir. So will countless angels and men be eternally drinking vast torrents of joy on the merest brink of that Babe's being, and He be no more drained, and no more affected by it, nay, less so, because in reality not at all, than gigantic Lake Superior whence the little singing-bird took one sip, and flew away. Is it the bands which are around Him that hurt Him, and make Him stoop to the facile tears which are the law of childhood ?

Infancy is truly a prisoner in the incommodious swaddling-clothes of those lands, but in that Prisoner on the sand we recognise and worship the Immense. It is He who is the everlasting freedom of the world. He, who is there circumscribed within a given number of inches, in reality is at that instant expatiating beyond the clouds and the sunsets and the great stars and the frightening vastness of the heavy circling systems, and finds no term, comes to no limit, overflowing all possibilities of space in the grandeur of His simplicity. When we have filled with Him all the worldless abysses that we can imagine, we are then no nearer to an external edge of that Babe's life than we were before. But are His tears always silent tears, or does He. like other children, utter cries, cries of piteous eloquence. inarticulate appeals to a mother's love which somehow finds the right interpretations for them? If it were so, how His puling cry would thrill through our inmost soul, a thousand times more than the archangel's trumpet in the night of doom! From out of the complaining treble of that cry faith would disembarrass the voice of the Everlasting, the voice which Scripture compares to the sound of many waters; yet, like the noises of the dumb, His cry is without language. He is without words who is the Father's Word. He seems to know no language, of some one sound of whose inward music all languages are but a fragmentary, yet what a ravishing revelation, a revelation which cannot now gather itself up or back into the oneness which it has forgotten! All language is but one strain, escaped to earth, from that silent jubilee of the creatureless majesty of God in those old inconceivable epochs, which were not epochs because there was no time.

Look at His poverty, whose every circumstance claims tenderest pity and devoutest tears. We see it in the faces and the garb of Mary and of Joseph, and in the barrenness of provision which is around, beneath the tent of the open sky. Yet in that Child of poverty we adore the majesty before whom the heavenly hierarchies are at that instant prostrate, and tremble, even though they comprehend it not in its fulness. His riches are inexhaustible and incalculable. He is the plenitude of creation, out of whom millions of new hungering and thirsting creations could draw their manifold gleaming wealth, and make no impression on the fulness. His treasures are not only indescribable in their degree, but unimaginable in kind, with infinities which are not suited to our wants, or to any expenditure of creatures, but belong, if we may so speak, to the transcendental seeming needs of the illimitable intelligence and holiness of God, to those adorable necessities of the Divine Life out of which inevitably proceed the Eternal Generation of the Son and the Eternal Procession of the Spirit.

In the Child vouchsafing to be eager at His Mother's breast we adore, as the hymn of the Church suggests to

us, the God who feeds the world, and all its creatures, with unforgetting providence. The beasts in their desert lairs, the birds of the untrodden woods, the fishes of the sea, the populous insects beneath the barks of trees or under the stones of the fields, all these, together with sinners in their palaces, and the homeless poor in the rich men's streets; are being fed by Him. He is catering for them even at that very hour, feeding Mary and Joseph themselves by that desert well, and managing, with all the strange varieties of climate and season, the provisioning of the million-peopled earth, with all its attendant arrangements of meteorology and chemistry. In those two sciences, infants now but promising some day to be giants, the Babe could have told us secrets which would startle the wisest scholars of the present generation, and revolutionize all the science of the world.

As the breaths of wind pass momentarily over the evening waters, dimpling them with smiles of light, so the unaccountable smiles of childhood light themselves in the infant face, and pass away. The Babe on the sand also smiles; and His smile is the expression of His innumerable perfections in the marvellous unity of a human countenance. Smiles reveal character; so His reveals the character of the All-holy. It is the smile of Him who is perhaps at that moment judging a soul, and saving it by His mercy. It is the smile of Him who sees hell, and is keeping it in order. feeding its fires, and by His momentary judgments adding to its desolate population in the glory of His justice. It is a smile, in which we may catch, like the glow of sunset on tower or tree, the reflection of that grand worship in heaven, which He there beholds who is still there, having come on earth without ever leaving the Bosom of the Father, and which He not only beholds but is actually receiving. There is a wondering look too in His little eyes, when He smiles. Yet what wonder can He have? To Him belong the knowledge and the sight of all hearts. His glances illuminate all secrets. His eye without effort takes in at one gaze all the realms of space and all the kingdoms of spiritual intelligence. To it lie open at that moment all the hordes of thoughts of each angel or soul that ever was or will be, whether expressed in conversation, treasured up in books, or embedded in the unuttered silentness of profoundest cogitation. Must not His look of wonder be part of the dissembling of His lowliness, when His consciousness is at that moment dwelling in the light of all possible science, counting every sand in the wide wilderness, and noting the movements and biography of every errant fish in the vast seas, down even to each light-flash that glances from their silver scales. He sees Calvary also, and the dread monotony of the changeful Passion, and us with our sins, and Himself, and the Father, and the Holy Ghost, and wonders not, though in His beautiful sincere deceit He wears that wondering look of human infancy.

What separate claims also to our worship has every feature of His Countenance! The lips which Mary with timid frequency will dare to kiss, they are the very lips which are one day to pronounce our last irrevocable doom. They will perhaps speak words in heaven, like the grave minute-bells of eternity, each of which will surpass the revelations of earth, and will feed our souls with tingling wisdom and divinely impassioned love. These lips are rosy now in the freshness of their childhood; but they have one day to be white, withered, parched, and bloodmottled on the Cross. But, to speak not of separate features but of His whole beauty, it is not so much a disguise, as a tempering down, of His uncreated loveliness, a sheathing of His Godhead incomparably compassionate and wonderful. It is like Himself, like His own love, nearest to a revelation

of what He is. We all long to see the Father. Ages ago Philip the Apostle told His Master so in the name of all of us. Why is it that the Father so draws us, so pulls at the strings of our hearts, as if we must see Him, or be homeless and holily repining till we have seen Him? Look at the Child upon the sand. He is the veritable beauty of the Father, the beauty the Father sees in Himself, all of it, a complete as well as a faithful representation of it. Moreover the Father's love of Him, that beautiful coequal Word, and the beautiful Word's love of Him, not return of love, but contemporary, unbeginning love, are, or is, which shall we say? the beautiful, jubilant, ever-proceeding Spirit. If we sin-maimed creatures, who have barely crawled out of our evil into the sunshine of God's compassion, can see all this in His childish beauty on the sands, what did Mary see ?

But the sun is setting fast. Now the orb has sunk, sending a quivering effulgence of gold and crimson from its low level on the horizon over the unbroken smoothness of the stony sands. Mary and Joseph fall on their knees to pray, as if the pulses of light rang golden bells up in heaven to tell them it was compline time. It is not to the heaven above they look, nor to the ever-present Invisible, whose presence men acknowledge by shrouding their faces with their hands; but, like believers who steady themselves in prayer by fixing their eyes upon the tabernacle, they look and pray to that Almighty Child, whom Mary has laid for a moment on the sand,—"Bethlehem," 266-273.

XXIV

A TRIPTYCH OF THE WILDERNESS

THE desert is rich in the light-chequered monotony of its landscapes. Look at it with the flush of sunrise on its dewless sands. That misty blue line behind represents the distant undulations of Judea's southern hills. Here and there on the ground sparry stones glisten, like rain-drops on the boughs; but there are no rain drops there. It is a weary land which stretches out before us, flat plain with scattered tufts of stunted thorny shrubs, or wavy hollows in whose grooves no streamlet flows, but only a dry motionless torrent of stones, as if they got together there for company, and all as tawny as a lion's coat. There is a look of haste about the flying figures of the Mother and the Foster-father. Yet no garments are in disarray, or straggling out upon the morning wind. It is a modesty of precipitation, such as once before carried her so swiftly over the hill-country of Judea, and which does no dishonour to the tranquillity of her holiness. Her look breathes calm, even as she flies. Yet there is a timid clasping of the Infant to her bosom, which is more than the common embrace of an unanxious mother. Two creatures flying with the Creator across the wilderness, and invisible satellites far behind hunting the Creator to His death, but baffled by a woman's speed, to whose feet a mother's love, which is also a creature's worship, has given wings.

The wilderness trembles in the mist, dissolves and changes. The sun has ridden from east to west. There is a piece of broken ground, either as if some time the fiery earth had gaped, or as if the action of vehement waters had scooped rude lineaments of itself round about. Under the shadow

of a cliff, which is not tall, but lies so low that afar off the eye would look over it without suspecting the undulation in which it lies, there is a crystal well, a spring of modest volume, and separate spikes of grass stand up like miniature palisades in the sand, and some desert-haunting plants, with brittle, fleshy stalks grow near, and in the cool shade are Mary and Joseph resting. The shadow of the Eternal Father has grown even yet deeper upon Joseph; and somehow, if we might dare to depict it so, the grace of maternity sits more gravely upon Mary's brow. The Child visibly understands it all, but is mysterious, and holds His peace. The bird of prey that is floating over Him, like a spot of gold struck by the sunset in the air, is as large as He, and seems the more rightful master of the place.

Again—and it is now the heart of the wilderness. Even the robbers have no homes here. It is a desolate spot, remote from the track of the caravans. It is the dead of night. But there is no silence. The wilderness has many voices. It would puzzle us to know where they come from, but they do come, sad, moaning, and inarticulate. Is it the wind grating on the sand? Is it the sobbing of the reedy springs taken up by the quiet night from a thousand places, and breathed through a tube of darkness as if it were one murmuring note? Is it the sighing of the distant palm-trees, blending their solitary whispers into one? Is it the clefts of the rocks that make organs for the wind? Is it the very earth sleeping uneasily, and dreaming of its own desolate sterility? Or is it the joints of the great world that are creaking in the silent night, like a distant tramp of men walking upon snow? It is a strange lullaby for God. The moon shines down upon the group. All Three are sleeping, sleeping in the arms of solitude, in the midst of creation. God is sleeping between His two chosen creatures, the Son between the shadow of the Father and the shadow of the Holy Ghost. Who then is watching? In the bright darkness of the upper air we feel a Watcher, to whom our very thoughts dare not give any form. Is it His presence that makes the elements and inanimate things wail, as if they were in suffering, and were striving to let no sound of suffering escape? . . .

Time seems to pass, and a river to lapse invisibly at our feet. There is a mirage near the head of the Red Sea. But its palaces fall, its palms totter and break, and its blue lagoons shiver, and part, and show the true scenery beneath. It is the wilderness again. The Three are treading the wilderness. This time they are all treading it. There is no Infant. The Boy is at their side. He keeps up with them in a kind of running walk, and does penance by it. and deceives even Mary, that she may not find it out. The breezes of Judea are blowing in their faces. The leagues of hot sand have not sucked up the breath of the thyme, with which it was laden as it blew over the pale green sward and pastoral grounds of Judah and of Benjamin. Joseph is aged; and the shadow of the Eternal Father is yet deeper on him. There is a fuller heart in Mary's face, as of one who has been living so much longer in the awful intimacy of God. Calvary is meeting Bethlehem in the Boy's Soul, and there is something eternal in His eyes which comports itself marvellously with boyhood; and the clear speaking of His tones seems to make even the desert silent, as if it wished to absorb them in its loose sands, and keep them in its bosom as a compensation for its barrenness. Sunset and dawn, midnight and noon, wind and calm, storm and shower, darkness and starlight, ride over the wilderness, like the wind-driven cloud-spots on the mountain side, and vary its pictures almost endlessly, and in the heart of each picture sits a mystery, of whose beauty the generations of men will never tire. . . .

Evening has come down upon the land, the brief evening. The Nile glows like a glossy creature, swift, broad-backed, and almost noiseless, in the crimson sunset. Only at the edge the quick waters make the reeds twitter a little, except in the little earthy bays where the lotus-lily rises and falls at anchor quietly, just tremulously enough to shake its odours out upon the air, like incense from the thurible. The incarnate God is musing on the bank, Mary withdrawn a stone's throw from Him, as if she had felt it was His will, and yet withdrawn less far than the apostles at Gethsemane. Her gaze is as fixed upon Him, as an angel's look is fixed upon the Vision. His mind opens before us, as if a sanctuary were being unveiled, and it flows out of His eyes, as they are bent upon the stream, and catch the reflection of the golden light from the shining waters. In the scarce audible murmur of the river He hears the cry that rang through Egypt in the night, that terrible night of the first-born. It is as if the echoes of that wail had been undulating over the desert ever since. The tears gather in His eyes; for He thinks of Bethlehem, its mothers, and its Innocents. But He hears now in the stillness, while the evening breeze scarce waves its indolent pinions over the sun-shrivelled land, the trampling of countless hurrying feet. It is the children of Israel going forth in the darkness upon their Exodus; and there is the Exodus of a whole world to be accomplished now, and it is He who must cleave the sea, and how shall it be cloven? The twilight deepens. Almost suddenly it is dark. The eyes of the Child have gone out in the darkness, and the wind rises, and the mist gathers on the stream.-" Bethlehem," 344-346, 348, 352, 353.

XXV

THE THREE DAYS' LOSS

THE Mother without the Child! This is indeed a change to pass upon our Lady's sorrows. Bethlehem had its sorrows. and Nazareth had still more, and on Calvary the tide rose highest. But in all these places the Mother was with her Child. There was light therefore even in the darkness. In this third dolour, the Three Days' Loss, it was not so. When we wish to depict our Blessed Mother with reference to her own graces, such as the Immaculate Conception, we paint her without her Child, looking heavenwards, as if to show that she was a creature upon whom heaven was falling in fast showers of grace from the Creator. When we wish to see her as she stands to us, as the Mother through whose hands the Son pleases to make His graces pass, we represent her also without her Child, her eyes cast downwards towards the earth, and her hands dropping light and freshness on the world. But there are two childless pictures of her in Scripture, which have nothing to do with either of these. The one is her third dolour, when in sorrowful amazement she is searching Jerusalem to discover Jesus; and the other is her seventh dolour, when she is returning at nightfall from the garden-tomb, to the great city, leaving her buried Love behind in His chamber of the rock. Thus are the likenesses of the Passion more and more mingling with the Infancy. They mingle especially in this third dolour, which, both on the side of Jesus and of Mary, is one of the greatest mysteries of the Three-and-Thirty Years. . . .

The shades of evening had fallen on the earth, before the two bands of men and women met at the accustomed haltingplace. Joseph was waiting for Mary, but Jesus was not with him. Mary's heart sank within her before she spoke. Joseph knew nothing. His unworthiness would have felt surprise, if Jesus had accompanied him rather than His Mother. He had supposed He was with Mary, and had not been disquieted. The bustle of the halt, the cries of the crowd, the preparations for the evening meal, the unloading and watering of the beasts of burden, all died out of their ears. They were suddenly alone, alone amidst the multitude, more lonely than two hearts had ever been since the sun set on Adam and Eve, flushing the mountains of paradise which to them were as cloisters they might cross no more. Joseph was crushed to the very earth. The light went out in Mary's soul, and a more terrific spiritual desolation followed than any of the saints had ever known. What could it mean? Jesus was gone. It was a harder idea for her to realize than the mystery of the Incarnation had been. If the rolling universe had stopped, it would have been less of a surprise. If the trumpets of doom had blown, her heart would not have quailed as now. They would ask among their kinsfolk and acquaintance, if He was with them; as many of them loved the Boy exceedingly, with yearnings of heart which they who felt them could not comprehend. They would ask, but Mary knew it would be all in vain. She knew Him too well not to be certain that, if He had been in the company, He would long since have joined her. No such ordinary occurrence would have been allowed to break the union between her heart and His. She felt that the depth of her misery was not going to be so shallow as this. An abyss had opened, and a cold wind was rushing out of it which froze every sanctuary within her soul. They made their search. It was only to receive one negative after another, varied by the different amounts of sympathy which accompanied each. Their inquiry ended, and deep night had come. The sun had set on one

side of the globe and had risen on the other, but the thousands of leagues of darkness did not hide, nor the thousands of leagues of light reveal, two hearts in such consummate misery as Joseph's and her own. There were many sorrows on earth that night, but there were none like hers. There have been many nights since then, with their beautiful raven darkness braided with stars, and many incredible sorrows, with nothing like a star set in their dismal blackness, but there have been no sorrows like hers. The stars would not have shone, if they had had hearts within them. The darkness should have wept blood instead of dew, to be in keeping with the forlorn anguish of that memorable night. When all Egypt rang suddenly at midnight with the terrible wail for the firstborn, and the troubled river hurried away from the intolerable sickening sounds of human woe, the countless cries that wove themselves into one amazing voice, as if the great earth itself had spoken in pain, from the Cataracts to the Delta, were not freighted with such a load of misery as lay that hour on Mary's single heart.

In the darkness, alone, silent, Mary and Joseph were treading the road again to the Holy City. Their feet were sore and weary. What matter? Their hearts were sorer and more weary. The darkness in Mary's spirit was deeper than the darkness on the hills. Even if the paschal moon were not shining, they would see the white glimmer of the road; but no road out of this sorrow glimmered in her heart. Had it all been, not a dream certainly, but a transitory thing? Was she to see Jesus no more? Had He withdrawn His wonted illumination from her heart for ever, for ever veiled now that beautiful Heart of His, where for the last twelve years the curtains had been looped up, and she had seen all its mysteries, read all its secrets, lived almost perpetually in its life? Was she unworthy of Him?

She knew she was. Had He therefore left her? It was not like Him. But she did not see things as before, and it might be so. Had He gone back to His Father, leaving unredeemed the world which did not want Him? No! that was impossible. He had not paid the price of her Immaculate Conception yet. Tyrants seldom slumber. Had Archelaus watched his opportunity, and seized Him? Herod might have left his son that charge as a legacy of state-craft. Had she perhaps mistaken the date of Calvary, and was it to come now? Was the Boy hanging on a cross that moment, in the darkness on some mount outside the gates? Oh, the bewildering agony of this unusual darkness! She had seen all the Passion before in her spirit. How did it go? Was she not there? She cannot remember. She can recover nothing. Within, there is nothing but darkness, covering everything. Is He actually dead without her, His Blood shed, and she not there? Agony! Has He gone to death, purposely without telling her, out of kindness? Oh, no! so cruel a kindness would have been contrary to the union of their hearts. But this, this very separation, without a word, and then this interior darkness in which He has wrapped her soul,—how do these comport with that union of their hearts? Ah! then there is not certainty to go upon, except the certainty that He is God. This very sorrow shows her that she is not to argue from what has gone before. The past, it seems, did not necessarily prophesy the future. Not to understand it, that is such suffering. Sudden darkness after excessive light is like a blow. Her soul wants to see. But it is hooded. A baffling blindness has come on. She has nothing left her now, but that which never was dislodged from the depths of her soul, the gift of peace. Oh, how the waters of bitterness rose silently out of the endless caverns of that peace. the subterranean bitterness which—who does not know that has once felt it ?—leaves its taste for life.—" The Foot of the Cross," 152, 153, 158-161.

XXVI

THE HOLY HOUSE OF NAZARETH

THE beauty of the earthly paradise, which God planted with His own hand, and whither He came at the hour of the evening breeze to converse with His unfallen creatures, was a poor shadow of the loveliness of the Holy House during the eighteen years of the Hidden Life. We cannot guess at all the mysteries which were enacted within that celestial cloister. The words were few, yet in eighteen years they were what we in our human way should call countless. The very silence even was a fountain of grace. There were tens of thousands of beautiful actions, each one of which had such infinite worth that it might have redeemed the world. During those eighteen years an immeasurable universe was glorifying God all day and night. The beauty of the trackless heavens swayed by their majestic laws, vast unpeopled orbs with their processes of inanimate matter or their seemingly interminable epochs of irrational life, earth with all its inhabitants, the worshippers of the true God amid whatever darkness in all its regions, the chosen flowers of the bygone generations in Abraham's bosom in the limbus of the fathers, the little children a multitudinous throng of spirits in their own receptacle beneath the surface of the earth, the souls worshipping amid the fires of purgatory,-all were swelling, as in one concourse of creation, the glory of the Most High. The wide creation of angels, above all, peopling the immeasurable capacities of space, sent up to God evermore, the God whom they beheld clearly with the eyes of their intelligence, a worship of the most exquisite perfection. But the entire creation was as nothing to the Holy House of Nazareth. One hour of that life outweighed ages of all the rest, and not only outweighed it on a comparison, but outweighed it by a simple infinity. There was the centre of all creation, spiritual or material, in nearly the most sequestered village of that obscure Galilee. Why should the centre be there? Who does not see that God's centres in all things baffle the calculation of the sciences of men?

—"The Foot of the Cross," 199, 200.

XXVII

A DIPTYCH OF THE HIDDEN LIFE

THERE are many pictures which remain to this day in heaven, painted upon the unforgetting intelligences of the angels, of which the scene was Joseph's shop. The common litter of a carpenter's working place is there. Boards propped up against the walls, pieces of wood lying over each other in all shapes and at all angles, the floor strewn with chips, and straight lines of sawdust under the place where he has been sawing, various tools mingling in the apparent confusion, and mutilated implements of agriculture lying outside the door: this is the scene which presents itself, and Mary is standing in the doorway of the house hard by. Joseph is showing Jesus how to do some work, and his broad man's hand is laid on the small hand of the Boy, and is gently guiding His fingers. He is doing it mechanically; for he is gazing rather on the Saviour's face than on the work. He sees the Boy all resplendent with glory, and his faith recognises in Him the omnipotent Creator, the Eternal Worker, who so deftly fashioned the countless worlds, and

whose fingers he, the aged carpenter, is now venturing to press, to guide, and to manipulate as he wills. The old man's soul overflows with adoration, but tranquilly, without wave or sound, as if fed by silent springs from underneath. Nevertheless he does not desist from guiding the hand of Jesus. He does not interrupt the lesson, which he knows to be so little needed. He is too humble for that. He understands his office. It was incomprehensible to him always from the first. The exercise of his authority could never be otherwise to him than the exercise of a sublime obedience. Then, as his soul swells with adoration, selfabjection falls over his features like a veil of light, as the sun breaks the clouds and unrolls his splendour downwards from the brow of the hill to the vale beneath. His humility so clothes him with majesty that he looks almost godlike. and his age is transfigured into a semblance of eternity.

As He is older now, and stronger, the water-pitcher is not too great a weight for the Creator of the world. Yet it bows Him forward, and makes Him tread with a different step, as He climbs up that grassy path with His burden. Many are coming and going from the well. All have a word to say to Mary's Son; and He answers, sometimes with a word, more often with His eye. All are contented. He is a silent Boy: but there is something in His presence in that little town, like the sun in heaven, whose shining and obscurity make more difference to man and beast and herb than words can tell. Women with their pitchers upon their heads stop, and turn, and gaze upon Him, and then sigh with envy at Mary's lot, contrasting it with secret sorrows of their own in which their sons bear mournful part. The rough manners of the Nazarenes soften, when the sunbeam of His smile is on them. Cold hearts warm, and hard hearts grow gentle, and anger dies away, and all are divinely unmanned as He comes among them.

He is already a king, a little king of men's hearts, crowned in the love and loyalty of the most boorish village in all Syria. They have crowned the Boy; but they will uncrown the Man, when His royalty becomes a serious thing. He knows this already. He looks at them with more than sorrow, with more than love, with an indescribable yearning which attunes all His features. They have made Him king: but for their sakes He is rather longing to be priest. The water as it gurgles in the pitcher is like a heavenly temptation to Him. His thoughts are onward upon Jacob's well and the woman of Samaria. His thoughts are over all the world in countless Christian fonts. The Blood in those veins must mingle with the water in that pitcher. before it will cleanse the sins of Nazareth away. The thought is an ever-present one with Him; yet His Heart leaps up now as if it were new, and the face of the Boy broadens into the countenance of the Man of Calvary, and, almost mastering the characteristic sweetness of His youth, it is clothed, as with a fire, in the mature beauty of the Redeemer.—"Bethlehem," 357-359.

XXVIII

MARY'S POWER OVER JESUS

EACH Christmas, as it comes, brings back to us old charms. familiar joys because they have been joys from childhood. One of these is the power of Mary over Jesus. Who does not remember the astonishment of his early years, when he had come to appreciate the meaning of our Lord being God. and yet in pictures and in Christmas mysteries saw Mary make free with Him as if He were a common child? Was He really as helpless as He seemed, or was He only feigning

helplessness? Neither; yet He lay on Mary's lap like anv other babe, and after all He was God. Then for the first time we felt an awe of Mary, because we seemed to see her more nearly and more truly. New thoughts struck us. We had, so it appeared, discovered something for ourselves beyond what we had ever been told; and it is always true that what we learn of ourselves goes deeper into us than what others teach us. Thus the mysteries of the Infancy opened out before us, and we read them all in the single light of His visible obedience to Mary. From the night when she showed Him to the shepherds, to the day when He seemed to adjourn His Father's business and went back with her to Nazareth for eighteen years, and again when, at the outset of His ministry, He began it with anticipating His time for working miracles, that He might still obey her, all seemed plain in that single light of His filial obedience. Nothing was left uninterpreted. It was a scene of heavenly wonders, but all was harmonious, and one spirit brooded over it all. Even over the Childhood of the Everlasting God Mary's maternal jurisdiction lay outspread like a golden glory. Were other thoughts, were fresh discoveries, to break up this vision, as the wind breaks up the visionary landscapes in the still water? Never. Fresh discoveries would be made. Unsuspected invisible things would be seen behind, would be seen through that glory; yet only to make it yet more glorious. Our youth's dream of the Mary-governed Infancy was never to pass away. For, as with most of our childish apprehensions of truth, the matter had been most truly apprehended, and in the truest way. Years have gone on, and with the years the heart has gone on also making many discoveries by that light of Mary. Age will not have done discovering; and then heaven will meet us with its last discovery, which will neither dishonour those which have gone before, nor eclipse

the light in which they have been made. But what is it which this light of Mary's maternal jurisdiction shows us now? Another jurisdiction which lies beneath, another obedience which stands behind, supporting, ennobling, glorifying Mary's power. It is His sovereign obedience to the Eternal Father: and once, by the darkest mystery in the Gospel, for the still further exaltation of His Mother, and for other divine reasons, the two obediences are allowed, not truly to come in conflict, but to seem to do so; as when, without her leave and to her intense anguish, He stayed behind in the temple when He was twelve years old. The hand of the Eternal Father seems to put aside the cloud of light, and let in the dazzling brightness of deep heaven upon us, and for the moment Mary's light is darkened, not so much darkened in itself, as darkened to the weakness of our sight, thus suddenly overpowered from on high.-"Bethlehem," 465-467.

XXIX

GLIMPSES OF THE PROCESSION OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

Our present task is to marshal a Procession of the Precious Blood, with all its various yet kindred images, through our minds. It shall be to us like the defiling of soldiers over the mountain passes. The bravery of war shall add to the beauty of the scenery, and the scenery shall set off the bravery of war. Far off we shall see the glittering pomp, and then again so near that the martial music shall strike upon our ears. Here the light shall fall upon it in all its beautiful array, and there the clouds shall obscure its path and the crags appear to swallow up the pageant. Much we may see which we cannot understand: but much also which

we can both understand and love. From first to last it all tells of Jesus. From first to last it is a thing of God. Nay, we must not be strange to it ourselves. We too must fall in with the Procession. We must climb with it, as part of its life, its beauty, and its music, until we are lost to sight among the cloud-covered mountains of eternity. Our soul longs for rest. It would fain seek some peaceful solitude, where the sights and sounds of the world cannot intrude. It yearns to repose itself on God in the vigilant sleep of prayer. How shall it attain its end? We read in the Book of Esther, that when King Assuerus could not sleep, "he commanded the histories and chronicles of former times to be brought him," and they read them before him. So may we have the history and chronicle of the Precious Blood brought to us. It will make music in our ears, like the reading of a famous ancestry to the highborn and the royal. It will be a picture before our eyes, like a procession emerging out of that first dark eternity of God, winding over the picturesque inequalities of time, and re-entering the second illuminated eternity of God, up which we see in a vista of confused gorgeousness, as those who look through the doorway of some vast cathedral, and behold the banners waving, and the masses of gold and colour all tinted with the hues of the painted windows, moving slowly in indistinct progress to the distant starry altar. . . .

The souls of Joachim and Anne have been adorned with unusual graces. The yearnings of the saints in Israel have burned within them until their hearts have hardly been able to endure the fire. The instincts of all the earth have grown uneasy, as if some unwonted thing were coming upon nature. In secret the Precious Blood has done a work which may vie with the great work on Calvary. It has effected the Immaculate Conception, wherein heaven was opened, and such abysses of grace poured out upon the

earth, that the accumulated graces of the four thousand years of human history, and even the worlds of grace with which the angels were so munificently endowed, were as drops to the ocean compared with the grace of the Immaculate Conception. Beautiful as an unexpected sunrise, seen suddenly as we turn out of the dark defiles of a mountain pass, was the Nativity of Mary, as the Procession of the Precious Blood came all at once into its visible effulgence. Perhaps there is not among the divine mysteries one of such unblemished gladness, of such unmixed joy, as the Nativity of our Blessed Mother. It was like Bethlehem, without those grave foreshadowings of Calvary which give to Bethlehem such pathetic solemnity. The birth of Mary was like a mystery of the unfallen world. It was the sort of mystery unfallen worlds would have, and its feast the sort of feast unfallen souls would keep. Swiftly the Procession advances. The shapes, the figures, and the symbols of the pageant seem to furl themselves one by one, while the Precious Blood assumes the distinct features of an actual Human Life. It is more heavenly now because it is more earthly. Its actual creation renders yet more visible those uncreated perfections out of which it sprang. It is more manifestly a glory to be worshipped, now that it can be seen in the Face of the Infant Jesus. . . .

At the point of Bethlehem, the Procession of the Precious Blood comes out into a light too strong for us to see the details of its magnificence. It is too near to us to be seen except in detail, and its details are too bright to be distinct. Like all the works of God, it hides itself by coming close up to us. It moved in fairest pomp along those Three-and-Thirty Years of visible, earthly, human life. Now and then it appeared upon the highways of the world, and in the streets of cities; but for the most part it haunted sequestered retreats of its own, and it haunted them with mys-

terious delays. It bore its banners furled. No voice of song, but the low strains of the Mother's Magnificat, were heard in its encampments. A saint, whose very soul was part of the silence of heaven, alone guarded it for nearly all its appointed years. For thousands of years the world had looked for its manifestation; and now behold! that manifestation was a concealment. Before it came, it was a palpable pageant of history. When it came, it melted, as a cloud melts in the sunshine, into the more substantial reality of a divine mystery. It hid itself in Mary; and we see it for an instant passing in unwonted haste over the uplands of Judea. We hear it in the tones of Mary's voice. We taste it in the sweetness of her chosen words. By the light of Joseph's lantern we catch a glimpse of it at midnight on the floor of a cave at Bethlehem, where shepherds gaze in silence, and oriental kings are kneeling to adore, while the angels, who that night could not be so silent as their God, sing high up in heaven, as if they feared lest their jubilee should wake the earth, and divulge the secret of their King. In the courts of the great temple we see the humble pomp of its dear Candlemas, a sort of childish anticipation of its second triumph on Palm Sunday more than thrice ten years hereafter. It moves along the sandy depressions and stone-sprinkled troughs of the desert, not in a glorious caravan of merchants laden with the gold and jewels of India, or with the drugs and gums of Araby, but in a timid pilgrimage with Joseph and with Mary. It hides amidst the bulrushes of the Egyptian river, as the cradle of the Hebrew lawgiver had hidden centuries ago. Once more it wound its way across the desert. Its Pilgrimage was one of three now, whereas seven years before it seemed only to be of two, itself being nothing more than the alternate burden of the Foster-father and the Mother. The Boy can walk now, though the sands weary His feet

with their hurning, and the publics bruise Him with their hardness. But the thorns of the acadias and the prickles of the salt-plants piezos Him, and His feet leave a faint line of red boking them, which angels adore and recognize as the vertiable Procession of the Precious Blood.

As if impelled by its kingly instincts, it drew near its own lawful talk - in Jerusalem, and then, as if glad of an enouse to hide itself afresh, it turned aside through fear of a usureing king, and sank, like a bird whom the hawk has been pursuing, into that hidden howl of mountain meadows, which men call Nazar-th. Here it disappeared, like a river which has gone und-reround. There was a long halt of tiree-and-twenty years. Occasionally, when the it wiing of the feasts gave greater facilities for its disguise, it went over the steep paths to its sacred metropolis, and worshipped in the temple amidst the multitudes. Once very notably it appeared there, ive years after the return from Egypt: and its voice was heard in the Jewish schools; and its beauty looked out of covish eves into the hearts of ili men ami wise scholars ami protound interpreters, and runnied them with its loveliness, which needed a more spiritual interpreting than they could give. This was a moment in the Pro-ession of the Previous Blood, of all moments the most difficult to understand; for it seemed to turn away from that fountain in Mary's heart, round which it had been flowing in rings that seemed to draw nearer at every is uit. But it had this time only fetched a wider on uit that it might better turn, and flow straight back into its fountain, and live hidden there in indistinguishable listingtness for eighteen years of another childhood, which the strength of size and age only adorned with more tender ministries, and only graced with a more beautiful docility. Even the appearances, the looks, the outward shows of divine mysteries are full of significance. In this staying

behind at Jerusalem it seems as if the Eternal Father and the mortal Mother were beckoning the Procession of the Precious Blood different ways, and as if in the end the Creator had given way to His chosen creature. This is the look of that secret parting of the Boy of twelve at the gate of Jerusalem.

But now, as through some gateway on which the sun is brightly shining, or some triumphal arch hung round with braided flowers, the Procession of the Precious Blood issues out of the pastoral solitude of Nazareth at Cana of Galilee. in the unexpected light of a marriage feast. It was as if the multiplying of the human family was a joy to its love of souls. With how exquisite a fittingness, and with how much disclosure of His own character, did our Lord make that first of His public mysteries a triumph of His Mother! We know not how to express the glory of that feast to her. The eternal counsels were anticipated at her word. The time, which in our Lord's mind had not come, came at His Mother's will; and the first refulgence of His miracles shone forth on her, and at her bidding. Through her He had entered on the earth: through her He entered on His Ministry. With her He went up Calvary: with her he mounted the Hill of the Ascension. All the mysteries of Jesus are glories of Mary. The Ministry is not less full of her fragrance than the Childhood or the Passion. As the Father's work was deferred for Mary when her Son was twelve, the same work was precipitated for her when He was thirty.

Through this portal, then, of Cana in Galilee, this Gate of Mary, as we may call it, the Precious Blood issued forth from its concealment. The low white houses gleamed with their flat roofs among the pomegranate trees, and the broad-leaved figs, and the shrubby undergrowths, while the plain below was all waving with the billowy corn.

The corn below, even if it bore a thousandfold, was but a poor figure of the harvest that Blood should gather now, that Blood which shone more ruby-like than the ripest pomegranate in Cana. A little water from the village well was turned into generous wine; but that Blood, which men will spill like water, shall be the wine of immortality to all the world. Now for three years the Procession of the Precious Blood moved to and fro within the precincts of the Holy Land. One while it was upon the hill-tops, which look down upon the lake, the lake of the Great Vocations, as we may fitly name it. Another while it was winding along the paths which clove the tall corn in the fields. The day saw it in the temple courts; the moonlight disclosed it in the grey hollows of the stony mountains. It went to carry blessing to the houses of the poor; and it crossed the inland sea in the boats of fishermen. Yet it did not move at random. Its very journeys were a ritual. It was like the procession in the consecration of a church. Its movements have a meaning, and make up a whole. Whether it goes round the walls with the bunch of hyssop, or writes alphabets on the ash-strewn floor, or clusters in seeming confusion round the vet unconsecrated altar, there is a symbol and a law in every posture. So was it with the sinuous wanderings of the Precious Blood in Palestine. Like the course of the Israelites in the desert, it had a pattern to the eye of God, and betokened some hidden wisdom, which we are unable to decipher. It was beautiful beyond words, beautiful beyond our comprehension. It had no ornaments. Its figurative pageantry was gone. The words of life were its only music. It was now neither like a pilgrimage, nor a march. There was nothing to which it could be compared. It was a Countenance which moved to and fro, intensely human because it was more than human, smiling, weeping, looking downcast, adoring,

speaking, clad in wonderful anger, bound in placid sleep, pale, weary, meek, submissive, yet unspeakably commanding. All human expressions gathered there, save one, and that was the expression of surprise. Sometimes in His words there was what sounded like a tone of surprise, escaping plaintively from some wounded love within His Heart. But on the vastness of His mind nothing like surprise could dawn, nor any perplexity pass upon the serenity of His Face. To see that Face was a heaven to the pure and good; and when the heart came to fear too much because the beauty of the Face was so reverend, its likeness to the Mother's face confused it sweetly with earthly things, and enabled the heart to repose on its divinity. Thus the Procession came to Olivet and Calvary.—"The Precious Blood," 136, 137, 147, 148, 148-153.

XXX

THE CROWNING WITH THORNS

Whose heart does not leap up at the thought of such a mystery,—the Coronation of the Creator by His creatures? Crowned as is each man's life with a beautiful coronal wreathed for Him by divine love out of all God's perfections, what grateful crown shall they set upon His Head, who has set them free by reigning over them as King? Alas! it is another Bloodshedding, the fourth Bloodshedding, the Crowning with Thorns. It is His dear dominion which is distasteful to their hearts. They cannot bear that He should call Himself a King. They would fain deride His kingship; but they feel and fear it all the while. If He had never been a King before, had He not become one now through the very royalty of His gentleness under the

ignominies of the past night and the outrages of that morning? Only a king's face could look so venerable through such disfigurement. But His sweetness embittered them. It sank them in their own estimation. It taunted them by the mildness of its silence. There was something so worshipful in His woe that it uncrowned their vulgar bravery. His look humbled them, because it was so beautiful. So in the blindness of their malice they wrought a divine mystery. They crowned Him King. The oppressed are given to be oppressors, and the violent to be brutal. If there be no other use of the Eternal God for Roman soldiers, at least He shall relieve the tedium of a Syrian guard-room. They have trouble enough with these Jewish criminals; they shall have sport out of them also. Sun and rain had come alternately on the green briars, which the unsuspecting earth had grown for the Creator. They had trailed over the sward. They had tangled themselves with many a juicy shoot. They had grown up into matted bushes, and the sun of autumn had hardened their soft spikes into strong tough barbs. Perhaps the honey-bees had come to their flowers to extract sweetness, and the restless butterflies had been attracted for a moment by their aromatic fragrance, or the birds had rifled their golden berries with their beaks. But who would have dreamed that they were yet to be gilded with the Blood of their Creator? Protecting their hard-skinned hands with their leathern gauntlets, the soldiers weave a crown of these sharp and obstinate thorns. What matter if it be not exactly round! What matter if it be not made to fit the head of their mock Cæsar! . . .

They thrust the crown upon His Head with rude vehemence. It is not round. It will not fit. They force the spikes into His skin; and the Blood comes, blackly and slowly, and with excruciating pain. The Jews cheer these

JUDAS III

Romans in their barbarity; and one of them, not without loud jocose applause, takes a heavy reed, and beats the crown into the Sufferer's Head. Long spikes go under the skin of the forehead, and come out above the eyes. Others pierce His ears. Others fret against the nerves of His neck. Others penetrate the skull, and burn like prickles of fire. He trembles from head to foot with the intolerable agony. His beautiful eyes are clouded with pain. His lips are bloodless with the extremity of endurance. But the face of a sleeping child is not more sweet than His, nor its heart more calm. He has grown more beautiful now that He is crowned. O Precious Blood! Lover of God's Dominion! Thou hast thirsted for Thy kingdom long; but with what strange and startling ritual hast Thou ordained Thy Coronation!—"The Precious Blood," 221, 222, 223, 224.

XXXI

JUDAS

Judas was almost a dolour by himself. We learn from the revelations of the saints, how Mary had striven in prayer for that wretched soul. She had lavished all manner of kindness on him, as if he had been more to her than either Peter or John. She had watched with unspeakable horror the gradual steps by which he had been led on to the consummation of his treachery. She had seen how sensitively the Heart of Jesus shrank from this cruel sin, and how many scourgings would have gone to make up the sum of pain which the traitor's single kiss had burned in upon His blessed lips. For a while it appeared as if Judas had been even more to her than Jesus, so had she occupied herself at that awful season to rescue the falling apostle, and to

hinder that tremendous sin. Moreover, none could know so truly as herself the immensity of that sin, and the whole region of God's fair glory which it desolated. She saw it in the Heart of Jesus. It was as if she had been an eyewitness of the fall of Lucifer, from the heights of heaven to the inconceivable lowness of that abyss which is now his miserable and accursed home. Terrible as was the thought that an apostle could betray her Son, it seemed even yet more injurious to His honour that, although Judas should have stained himself with so black a crime, he should yet despair of mercy and doubt the infinity of his Master's love. She had lost a soul. She had lost one of her little company. Jesus was not the first son she was to lose. That grand apostolic soul, decked with gifts like a whole angelic kingdom, crowned with the splendours of earth's most beautiful vocation, canonized by the especial choice and outpoured love of Jesus, was gone, gone down in the most frightful hopeless wreck. Even Mary had some things to learn. This was her first lesson in the loss of souls. If we were more like saints, we should know something of what it meant. The Passion began by losing an apostle's soul, and ended by saving the soul of a poor outcast thief. Such are the ways in which God takes His compensations. "The Foot of the Cross," 222, 223.

XXXII

THE CRUCIFIXION

Infinite justice is as far removed from cruelty as infinite love can be. Yet it was the Father, He who represents all kindness, all indulgence, all forbearance, all gentleness, all patience, all fatherliness in heaven and earth, who chose

that moment of intensest torture, when the storm of created agonies was beginning to pelt less pitilessly because it was now well-nigh exhausted, to crucify afresh, with a most appalling interior crucifixion, the Son of His own endless complacency. With effort, unutterably beyond all grace ever given except the grace of Jesus, Mary lifted up her heart to the Father, joined her will to His in this dire extremity, and in a certain sense, as well as He, abandoned her Beloved. She gave up the Son to the Father. She sacrificed the love of the Mother to the duty of the Daughter. She acknowledged the Creator only as the last end of the creature. She had done this at the outset in her first dolour, the Presentation of Jesus, and it was consummated now. O Mother! how far had that exacting glory of God led thy royal heart! She saw Jesus abandoned. She heard the outcry of His freshly crucified soul, pierced to the quick by this new invention of His Father's justice. And she did not wish it otherwise. She would have Him abandoned, if it was the Father's will. And it was His will. Therefore with all her soul, with the most unretracted, spontaneous consent, she would have Him abandoned. She would go down from the top of Calvary this moment, if the Father bade her. But her love rose up, as if it were desperate, to meet this uttermost exigency. No one would have dreamed that a human soul could have held so much love as she poured out upon Jesus at that moment. Was her heart infinite, inexhaustible? It really seemed so. For at that hour it combined, multiplied, outstripped all the love of the Three-and-Thirty Years, and rushed into His soul as if it would fill up with its own self the immense void which the dereliction of the Father had opened there. Everything went out of her, but the horrible bitterness of her martyrdom. Sorrow, pure, sheer, sharp, fiery sorrow was flesh and blood and bone and soul and all to her. All else was

gone into the heart of Jesus, which thereupon sent forth upon her an outpouring of love which deluged her with a fresh ocean of overwhelming woe. And by one miracle they both lived still.

Now, Blessed Mother! that thou standest on such incredible heights of detachment, the end may come! It was finished. All was finished. Chiefly creation. It had found a home at the grave of the first Adam, under the Cross of the Second. The Father had left Him. He must go to the Father. It is impossible they should be disunited. Creatures had done what they could. They had filled to the brim the Saviour's cup of suffering, and He with pitiable love had drained it to the dregs. But there was one created punishment still left, created rather by the creature than the Creator, created chiefly by a woman. It was the punishment of death, the eldest-born child of the first Eve. But could death hold sway over the living Life of eternity? Could Eve punish God? Was He to inherit the bitter legacy of the sweet Paradise? How could it be? How could He die? What could death be like to Him? Mary's heart must be lifted to the height of this dread hour. High as it is, it must be raised higher still, to the level of this divinest mystery. The Three-and-Thirty Years are ending. A new epoch in the world's history is to open. The most magnificent of all its epochs is closing. What will death be like to Him? Ah! we may ask also, what will life be like to her when He is dead? What will Mary herself be like without Jesus? She was not looking up, but she knew His eye was now resting on her. What strange power is there in the eyes of the dying, that they often turn round the averted faces that are there, and attract them to themselves, that love may see the last of its love ? His eye was resting on the same object on which it rested the moment He was born, when He lay suddenly on a fold of her robe

upon the ground while she knelt in prayer, and when He smiled, and lifted up His little hands to be taken up into her arms, and folded to her bosom. His arms were otherwise lifted up now, inviting us to climb up into them, like fond children, to see what the embrace of a Saviour's love is like She felt His eve, and she looked up into His Face. Never did two such faces look into each other, and speak such unutterable love as this. The Father held Marv up in His arms lest she should perish under the load of love, and the loud cry went out from the hill-top, hushing Mary's soul into an agony of silence, and the Head drooped towards her, and the eye closed, and the Soul passed her, like a flash, and sank into the earth,—and a wind arose, and stirred the mantle of darkness, and the sun cleared itself of the moon's shadow, and the roofs of the city glimmered white, and the birds began to sing, but only as if they were half reassured, and Mary stood beneath the Cross a childless Mother .-"The Foot of the Cross," 263-265.

IIIXXX

"BEHOLD THY MOTHER!"

HE, who is growing in devotion to the Mother of God, is growing in all good things. His time cannot be better spent; his eternity cannot be more infallibly secured. But devotion is, on the whole, more a growth of love than of reverence, though never detached from reverence. And there is nothing about our Lady which stimulates our love more effectually than her dolours. In delight and fear we shade our eyes when the bright light of her Immaculate Conception bursts upon us in its heavenly effulgence. We fathom with awe and wonder the depths of her Divine

Maternity. The vastness of her science, the sublimities of her holiness, the singularity of her prerogatives, fill us with joyful admiration united with reverential fear. It is a jubilee to us that all these things belong to our own Mother, whose fondness for us knows no bounds. But somehow we get tired of always looking up into the bright face of heaven. The very silver linings of the clouds make our eyes ache, and they look down for rest and find it in the green grass of the earth. The moon is beautiful, gilding with rosy gold her own purple region of the sky, but her light is more beautiful to our homesick hearts when it is raining over field, and tree, and lapsing stream, and the great undulating ocean. For earth after all is a home, for which one may be sick. So, when theology has been teaching us our Mother's grandeurs in those lofty, unshared mysteries, our devotion, because of its very infirmity, is conscious to itself of a kind of strain. Oh how, after long meditation on the Immaculate Conception, love gushes out of every pore of our hearts when we think of that almost more than mortal queen, heartbroken, and with blood-stains on her hand, beneath the Cross! O Mother! we have been craving for more human thoughts of thee; we have wanted to feel thee nearer to us; we can weep for joy at the greatness of thy throne, but they are not such tears as we can shed with thee on Calvary: they do not rest us so. But when once more we see thy sweet sad face of maternal sorrow, the tears streaming down thy cheeks, the quietness of thy great woe, and the blue mantle we have known so long, it seems as if we had found thee after losing thee, and that thou wert another Mary from that glorious portent in the heavens, or at least a fitter mother for us on the low summit of Calvary, than scaling those unapproachable mountain-heights of heaven! See how the children's affections break out with new love from undiscovered recesses

in their hearts, and run round their newly widowed mother like a river, as if to supply her inexhaustibly with tears, and divide her off with a great broad frontier of love from the assault of any fresh calamity. The house of sorrow is always a house of love. This is what takes place in us regarding Mary's dolours. One of the thousand ends of the Incarnation was God's condescending to meet and gratify the weakness of humanity, for ever falling into idolatry because it was so hard to be always looking upwards, always gazing fixedly into inaccessible furnaces of light. So are Mary's dolours to her grandeurs. The new strength of faith and devotion, which we have gained in contemplating her celestial splendours, furnishes us with new capabilities of loving; and all our loves, the new and the old as well, rally round her in her agony at the foot of the Cross of Jesus. Love for her grows quickest there. It is our birthplace. We became her children there. She suffered all that because of us. Sinlessness is not common to our Mother and to us. But sorrow is. It is the one thing we share, the one common thing betwixt us. We will sit with her therefore and sorrow with her, and grow more full of love, not forgetting her grandeurs,-Oh, surely never!-but pressing to our hearts with fondest predilection the memory of her exceeding martyrdom.—" The Foot of the Cross," 62-64

XXXIV

OUR LADY'S MARTYRDOM

THERE is always a look of cruelty in high destinies. Fortune drags its favourites through drawn swords. Mary's high destiny is not without this look of cruelty; and that which seems so cruel is the Divine Nature of her Son. It is the

result of the infinite perfection of God that He must necessarily seek Himself, and be His own end. It is thus that He is the last end of all creatures, and that there is no true end in the world but Himself. Hence it is part of His magnificence, part of His deep love, that all things were made for Him, and that His glory is paramount over all things else. His greatest mercy to His creatures is to allow them to contribute to His glory, and to permit them to do it intelligently and voluntarily. Rightly considered, the creature can have no blessedness so great as that of increasing the glory of his Creator. It is the only true satisfaction both of his understanding and his will, the only thing which can be to him an everlasting rest. Here then is another reason for the divine permission of our Lady's dolours. They were permitted in order that God might receive from her more glory than from any other creature whatsoever, or from all creatures taken together, always excepting the created nature of our Blessed Lord. They were permitted that she might have the surpassing privilege of being equal to the whole creation in herself, nay, absolutely and transcendently surpassing it, in the praise and worship, the glory and adoration, which she paid to the Creator. Terrible as the heights were which she had to climb, far removed beyond all sympathy and intelligence of the saints, deep as were the torrents of blood and tears through whose rocky channels she had to make her way, exacting as were the mighty graces which claimed so wonderful a correspondence, there was not a gift that Jesus ever gave her which she prized so highly as her stern Compassion. Oh, not for worlds would she have been excused one least exaggerating circumstance of her sorrow! In the very excess of the most intolerable of her afflictions, she enjoyed, in the spirit of deep worship, the inexorable sovereignty of God. It was God who hung upon the Cross. Her Son was God. It was the Crucified, pale

and faint and feeble and bleeding, whose glory was more illimitable than the world-girdling ocean, and was feeding itself with unimaginable complacence on the streams of supernatural beauty and consummate holiness, which the deeply piercing swords of her grief were drawing from the caverns of her immaculate heart. She as it were supplied for all that the saints owed Him for His Passion, but could never pay. At the foot of the Cross she was the world's worship; for what else in the world was worshipping Him in His abasement at that hour? And all this cruelty of God's avaricious glory, this insatiableness of His thirst for creatures, was to her the perfection of delight, the supremest exercise of her royalty, while it was on the part of her Divine Son by far the most inconceivable outpouring of His love, which she had received since the midnight of the Incarnation. The Church would be a different thing from what it is, if the sea of Mary's worship in her dolours were not part of its beauty, its treasures, and its powers before God. We can think less uneasily, less despondingly, of the unrequited Passion of our dearest Lord, when we remember the sorrow, like no other sorrow but His own, with which His Mother worshipped Him.

We too make our appearance in the matter. She must suffer for our sakes as well as for His. For is she not to be the mother of consolation, the comfort of the afflicted? And for this end she must go down into the depths of every sorrow which the human heart can feel. As far as a simple creature can do so, she must fathom them all, and experience them in her own self, without even excepting sorrow for sin, though it cannot be for sin of her own, but in fact for ours. She must know the weight of our burdens, and the kind of misery which each brings along with it. It must be a science to her to be sure of the measure of consolation which our weak hearts require in their various trials, and what

soothes and alleviates our suffering in all its manifold, unequal, and dissimilar circumstances. Our Blessed Lord did not save us from our sins by a golden apparition in the heavens, by a transient vision of the Cross shown in the farseen glory from the green dome of Tabor, or by an absolution once for all pronounced over the outspread west from seaward-looking Carmel. It was not His will that redemption should have the facility of creation, facility to Him at least, for to us the facilities are wonderful enough. He accomplished our salvation in long years, with infinite toilsome sufferings, out of abysses of shame, with the shedding of His blood, and with unutterable bitterness of soul. He earned it, merited it, struggled for it, and only mastered it by the prodigies of His Passion. All this need not have been so. A word, a tear, a look, might have done it, nay, an act of will, with or without an Incarnation. But it was not His good pleasure that it should be so. In His infinite wisdom, He chose not to lean on His infinite power alone, but took another way. So is it with Mary. She is not at once created mother of the afflicted, as by a sudden patent of nobility. She does not become the consolation of mourners by a mere appointment emanating from the will of the Divine Majesty. It might have been so, but it is not so. Her office of our Mother is a long and painful conclusion worked out from her Divine Maternity. She has toiled for it, suffered for it, borne herculean burdens of sorrow in order to merit it, and has mastered it at last on Calvary. Not that she could strictly merit such an office, as Jesus merited the salvation of the world; nay, rather her motherly office to us was part of the salvation which He merited. Yet, nevertheless, according to a creature's capacity, she came nigh to meriting it, and met God's gratuitous advances to her on the way. How needful then was it for us that God should permit her dolours! What would the sea of human

sorrows be without Mary's moonlight on it? The ocean. with the dark, heavy, overspread clouds lowering upon it, does not differ more widely from the silvery plain of green and whitely flashing waters, exulting in the sunlight, than the weary expanse of life's successive cares, without the softening and almost alluring light which falls upon it from Mary's love, differs from life as it now lies before us beneath her maternal throne. How many a tear has she not already wiped away from our eyes! How many bitter tears has she not made sweet in the shedding! And there is age, and the yearly narrowing circle of those we love, and sickness, and death, all yet to come, and to what amount may we not have to draw upon the treasure of consolations in her sinless heart? Oh, it was well for us, and it was most entirely to her heart's content, that God permitted her dolours, that she might be so much the more really the mother of the afflicted; for the heaviness of her sorrows is daily the lightening of ours; and how little it is that we can bear, and how great the load which she could bear, and how royally she bore it!

Our Blessed Lord was at once our atonement and our example. He redeemed the world solely by His Precious Blood. By His merits alone are we saved. His prerogatives as our Redeemer are simply unshared by anyone. His Mother had to be redeemed as well as the rest of us, though in a different and far higher way, by prevention, not by restoration, by the unmated grace of the Immaculate Conception, not by regeneration from a fallen state. Yet it was His will that His Mother, her office, her consent, her graces, her sufferings, should be so mixed up with the scheme of redemption, that we cannot separate them from it. It was His ordinance that her Compassion should lie close by His Passion, and that His Passion without her Compassion would be a different Passion from what it actually was. Thus He seems to draw her almost within the same law of

expiation which surrounded Himself, so that it should be true that there are many senses in which she may be said to have taken part in the redemption of the world. But if this is true of Christ as our atonement, where the union of the Divine Nature with the Human was needful to the infinite satisfaction of the work, much more is it true of Christ as our example. This was an office which she was more nearly competent, through His own grace, to share with Him; and one which the fact of her being simply a creature, and altogether human, would bring more touchingly home to us. Thus we may perhaps venture to suppose that God permitted the dolours of Mary, in order that she might be all the more excellently our example. Sorrow is more or less the characteristic of all human life; and it is one which, while it contains within itself especial capabilities of union with God, also deranges and perturbs our relations with Him more than anything else. It assaults our confidence in Him, and confidence is the only true worship. It engenders temptations against the faith, or finds something congenial in them when they come. It leads to a certain kind of peevishness and petulance with God, which comes from the very depths of our nature, from the same depths as love and adoration, and which, while it is secretly akin to both of these, often succeeds in destroying both, and usurping their vacant places. That this petulance is a true phenomenon of the creature's nature, is shown by the surprising manner in which God justifies the petulance of Job, and finds sin that needed expiation in the criticism of his friends upon him, while He, the Searcher of hearts, discerns in Job's bold querulousness nothing that damages the integrity of his patience, and much that is in harmony both with reverence and love. The endurance of sorrow is perhaps the highest and most arduous work we have to do, and it is for the most part God's ordinance that the amount of

sorrow to be endured should increase with the amount of holiness enabling us to bear it. We must bear it naturally even while we are bearing it supernaturally. There is no sanctity in unfeelingness, or in the blunting of the soul, even when religious interests have blunted it by a superior engrossment and a higher abstraction. Spirituality no doubt hinders us from feeling many sorrows, and no one will say that such indifference is not in many ways a privilege. But it must not be confounded with an heroic endurance of sorrow. To be heroic in this matter, the heart must feel to the quick, and divine love must barb the more cruelly, and drive the deeper in, the shafts with which we are wounded. Now, in all this, Mary is our example, and a purely human example, an example moreover which has as a matter of fact produced such results of exceeding sanctity and supernatural gracefulness in the Church, that we may safely venture the conjecture that it was one of the reasons for which God permitted her surpassing martyrdom.-" The Foot of the Cross," 21-26.

XXXV

THE SETTING SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

LET us come out under the starry sky, and think of this prodigality of the Precious Blood. The great tent of heaven above us seems to waver, and the stars to swing like lamps from its purple roof. But the desert could not be more silent than this outspread scene. If the uninstructed man looks at the starry skies, he either feels no mystery in them, or feels that it is a mystery which he cannot understand. Some feeling, which if it is not poetry is akin to poetry, and which if it is not religion is akin to religion, would surely

be awakened within him. But all would be vague, restless, and uncertain, and therefore would soon weary him, and so be transient, and speedily forgotten. The astronomer would look on the loveliness of this spangled night with far other eyes. His knowledge would disentangle the constellations for his eyes. The orbs would be individuals to him, with names, known points, and some peculiarities. The purple concave would at once inscribe itself for him with glittering lines and orbits, better than the grooved spheres of Ptolemy. It would be a joy to him to inform so much seeming confusion with so much real order. He might think little of the beauty of night, and still less of the beauty of the God of night. But the scene would speak in grand sonorous language to his understanding. Then let us bring a poet to the place. He might know as little of the mechanism of the heavens as the uninstructed man. But he would understand the scene by feeling it. He would feel that the starry heavens outside corresponded marvellously with the starry heavens within him. Behold him. His soul is taken captive with the beauty of night. He looks. He grows calm with a sweet calmness. Chafings cease. Breathings as of far-off music rise up from some deep sanctuary within his soul. The beauty melts him; the glory masters him; and he sings the infinity of God. Both the astronomer and the poet have their truth. But the poet's truth is a truer truth than that of the astronomer.

So it is in looking at the world redeemed. The uninstructed man sees nothing in it but puzzle and contradiction. His faith is vague; and where faith is not clear, there is seldom earnestness. There is truly a look of God about the world, and a wandering fragrance of Jesus. But it breeds little more in him than a kind of incredulous superstition. To the instructed believer, who is without the poetry of religion, whose head errs because his heart does not help it.

whose thoughts go wrong because they are speculations instead of prayers—to him the aspect of redemption is what the starry skies are to the astronomer. He admires; he is amazed; he praises. Yet adoration is so little to his taste, and worship so uncongenial to his disposition, that the demand for it at once awakens a kind of scepticism even in his faith. He doubts whether so much be done, because he sees so little come of it. He judges by what he sees with the eye. He does not know how to divine with his heart. He does not perceive that the world he sees is nearly as far beyond his understanding as the God who is invisible. Sight does not help us to understand men. Their actions are not their hearts. Still less does it help us to understand grace, which, when it supernaturalizes nature, lies undermost, not uppermost. To understand God and God's world we must look at Him and it from the Precious Blood point of view. The saints of the Church are the poets of redemption. It is from this point of view that they always see the world. It was thus that Mary saw the world at all times, a vision most awful, yet most touching and most dear. It is the way in which God sees it at this instant. All things to Him, good or evil, are tinged with the Precious Blood. He beholds them all in His own repetition of Josue's miracle, in that unsinking crimson sunset of the Precious Blood, which He has bidden to hang in all its beauty on the horizon of creation for ever.—" The Precious Blood," 246-248.

XXXVI

THE PRICE OF OUR REDEMPTION

MEN can lie for hours, and look upon a running stream. It seems to afford them at once occupation and repose. Its uninterrupted sameness fills them with tranquillity, while

its unintermitting lapse gratifies their sense of life. They feel that they are thinking; yet they are hardly conscious of their thoughts. Their eye is fixed with a sort of fascination on the noiseless gliding waters, and they are soothed, rested, and engaged. This is a faint picture of what often happens to us in our prayers, especially with regard to certain mysteries, such as the Crucifixion, which is the Sixth Bloodshedding. It is so familiar to us that, like the river, we understand it all at sight. We cannot reason about it. It is too much part of our daily lives for that. We do not need to elicit the right affections; for they come unbidden, and flow in an order of their own. The significance of the mystery is at once too deep and too plain for words. It is so vast an object of faith, that simply to gaze upon it seems to be the broadest study of it. Moreover, like all large objects, it is one of those mysteries which are best seen at some distance. We see the whole of it then. We comprehend its size, its shape, its fashion, and the disposition of the groups round about it. Who does not know the strange, vivid, palpable peace which distance gives to sunlit vistas in a forest? There is something of this kind about meditation on the Crucifixion. How almost visionary looks the bone-strewn sward and the tufted grass of that green hill-top, with its crosses standing against the dark sky. and a kind of wan sunshine creeping up the mound, as if it came rather from the white roofs of the city than from the sun in heaven! The Precious Blood has been out in the vast calms and ocean solitudes of the mind of God. It has voyaged through the beautiful tranquillities of the creations of spirit, matter, and men. Its lanterns have gleamed like red beacons in the unspeakable tempests of the divine anger. in falls of angels and of men, in floods and fires, in judgments and captivities, in discordant panics of Babel and bituminous upheavings of Gomorrah. It has kept its course over thousands of years of the uneasy currents of human history; and lo! that hill-top was all the while its haven! The Cross was its predestinated anchor, holding it to earth. How marvellous a harbour! How like one of those plans of God, which are so little like any plan of ours! The Precious Blood has found at last a home, which is seemingly dearer to it than the Sacred Heart.—"The Precious Blood," 227-229.

XXXVII

THE TAKING DOWN FROM THE CROSS

THE darkness of the eclipse had passed away, and the true shades of evening were beginning to fall. The Cross stood bare on Calvary against the light which the setting sun had left behind it in the west. The spectacle of the day was over, and the multitudes of the city were all gone, and the current of their thoughts diverted elsewhere. A few persons moved about on the top of the mount, who had been concerned with the taking down of Jesus from the Cross, or were bringing spices from the city to embalm Him. Mary sat at the foot of the Cross, with the dead body of her Son lying across her lap. Is Bethlehem come back to thee, my Mother, and the days of the beautiful Childhood?

There are many varieties of human sorrow. It is difficult to compare them one with another; because each has its peculiarity, and each peculiarity has an eminence of suffering belonging to it, in which no other sorrow shares. Thus it may easily happen that a sorrow, which in itself looks less than another, may in reality be greater, because of the time at which it comes, or the circumstances under which it occurs, or the position which it occupies in a series of other griefs. This is the case with the sixth dolour, the Taking

Down from the Cross. It is the grief of an accomplished sorrow, and in this respect differs at once from the strain of a distressing anticipation, or the active struggle of a present misery actually accomplishing itself. This difference cannot be unknown to us in our own experience. When we are in the act of suffering we are not fully conscious of the efforts we are making. Our whole nature rises to meet what we have to endure. Capabilities of pain, of which we had hitherto no suspicion, disclose themselves. Perhaps also we have a greater amount of supernatural assistance than afterwards. But when the pressure is lightened, when the strife is over, then we become conscious of the drain which grief has made upon our strength. The weariness of sorrow, like bodily fatigue, comes when all is over. We stiffen, as it were, and our heart begins to ache more sensibly, in the seeming tranquillity which follows the misfortune. The reaction makes itself felt in a peculiar depression, which is almost more hard to bear than actual suffering, not so much because it is intrinsically greater than actual suffering, but because it comes after it, and, being itself the exhaustion of our powers of endurance, it has nothing under it to support it.

It happens also for the most part that, by a merciful cruelty of Providence, our ordinary duties, or even sometimes new duties to which our sorrow has given birth. present themselves before us, and require our energy and attention. But, while this often hinders the reaction of sorrow from going too far, it is also in itself hard to bear: we are seldom in greater want of grace than in this moment of resuming the duties of our station after an interruption of more than common sorrow. It is like beginning life again at a disadvantage. We have perhaps more to do, when we are less able to do it. We have used up our power of bearing grief; and just when the rawness of our misery is passing

off, new duties come which, either by contrast or by association, open the old wounds afresh, and how are we to endure it? Moreover, excessive grief, even when it lasts but for a short time, seems to have a peculiar power to destroy habits. Things, even hard things, are easy to us, because we are accustomed to them. But after violent sorrow, everything appears new and strange. We have lost our old facility. Things have changed places in our minds. Easy things are now hard, because of this very novelty. Yet life is inexorable. It must go on, and under the old laws, like a ruthless machine which cannot feel, and therefore cannot make allowances. Now perhaps is a greater trial of our worth than when we were enduring the blows which misfortune was dealing upon us. This is the account of the sixth dolour; this is the place it occupies in the sorrows of our dearest Mother. Think of the Crucifixion, and all that it involved, and is not the reaction after that likely to be something which it is quite beyond our power adequately to conceive? Immense as is the holiness of her Immaculate Heart, sorrow can still find work to do, and can build the edifice higher, as well as embellish what is built already. . . .

Old times came back upon the Mother's heart, and the remembrance of the other Joseph, who had been so often privileged to handle the limbs, and touch the Sacred Flesh of the Incarnate Word. It would have been his office to have taken Jesus down from the Cross. But he was gone to his rest, and one that bore his name supplied his place, and it was both sweet and grievous to Mary that it should be so. One Joseph had given him his arms to lie in, the other should give Him his own new monument to rest in; and both should pass Him from their own arms to those of Mary. It is strange too how often the timid are unexpectedly bold. These two disciples, who had been afraid to

confess their Master openly when He lived, are now braving publicity when even apostles remain within the shelter of their hiding-place. Happy two! with what sweet familiarities and precious nearness to Himself, is not Jesus recompensing their pious service at this hour in heaven!

With gentle hand, tremblingly bold, as if his natural timidity had developed into supernatural reverence, Joseph touches the crown of thorns, and delicately loosens it from the head on which it was fixed, disentangles it from the matted hair, and without daring to kiss it, passes it to Nicodemus, who reaches it to John, from whom Mary, sinking on her knees, receives it with such devotion as no heart but hers could hold. Every blood-stained spike seemed instinct with life, and went into her heart, tipped as it were with the Blood of her Son, inoculating her more and more deeply with the spirit of His Passion. Who can describe with what reverential touch, while the cold Body was a furnace of heavenly love burning against his heart, Joseph loosened the nails, so as not to crush or mutilate the blessed Hands and Feet which they had pierced. It was so hard a task that we are fain to believe angels helped him in it. Each nail was silently passed down to Mary. They were strange graces, these which were now flowing to her through the hands of her new son; yet after all not so unlike the gifts which Jesus had Himself been giving her these three-andthirty years. Never yet had earth seen such a worship of sorrow as that with which the Mother bent over those mute relics, as they came down to her from the Cross, crusted too as they were, perhaps wet, with that Precious Blood, which she adored in its unbroken union with the Person of the Eternal Word. But with what agony was all this worship accompanied, what fresh wounds did not all these instruments of the Passion make in her heart, what old ones did they not re-open!

But a greater grief was yet to come. The Body was detached from the Cross. More and more thickly the angels gathered round, while thrills of love pierced with ecstatic bliss their grand intelligences. Mary is kneeling on the ground. Her fingers are stained with blood. She stretches the clean linen cloth over her arms and holds them out to receive her Son, her Prodigal come back to her again, and come back thus! And was He not a Prodigal? Had He not wilfully gone out from her quiet home into the wildest and rudest of worlds, leagues and leagues distant from the purity and love of her spotless heart? Had He not spent all His substance on companions, worthless and despicable? Was it not a riotous spending, a riot of some eighteen hours' duration? Had He not been prodigal of His Precious Blood, of His beauty, His innocence, His life, His grace, His very Divinity? And now He was coming back to her thus! Can such a sorrow, such an accumulation of concentring sorrows, have any name? Can she bear the weight? Which weight? The sorrow or the Body? It matters not. She can bear them both. From above, the Body is slowly descending. She remembers the midnight hour when the Holy Ghost overshadowed her at Nazareth. Now it is the eternal Son who is so strangely overshadowing His kneeling Mother. Joseph trembled under the weight, even while Nicodemus helped him. Perhaps also it was not the weight only which made him tremble. Wonderfully must grace have held him up to do what he did. Now it is low enough for John to touch the sacred Head, and receive it in his arms, that it might not droop in that helpless rigid way, and Magdalen is holding up the Feet. It is her old post. It is her post in heaven now, highest of penitents, most beautiful of pardoned spirits! For one moment Mary prostrates herself in an agony of speechless adoration, and the next instant she has received the Body on her

extended arms. The Babe of Bethlehem is back again in His Mother's lap. What a meeting! What a restoration! For a while she remains kneeling, while John and Magdalen, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the devout women adore. Then she passes from the attitude of the priest to the attitude of the mother. She rises from her knees, still bearing the burden as lightly as when she fled with Him into Egypt, and sits down upon the grass, with Jesus extended on her lap.

With minutest fondness she smooths His hair. She does not wash the Blood from off His Body. It is too precious; and soon He will want it all, as well as that which is on men's shoes, and the pavement of Jerusalem, and the oliveroots of Gethsemane. But she closes every wound, every mark of the lash, every puncture of the thorns, with a mixture of myrrh and aloes, which Nicodemus has brought. There was not a feature of His blessed Countenance, not a mark upon His Sacred Flesh, which was not at once a sorrow to her, and a very volume of profoundest meditations. Her soul went through the Passion upon His Body, as men trace their travels on a map. The very quietness of her occupation, the very concentration of her undistracted thoughts, seemed to enable her to go deeper and deeper down into His sufferings, and to compassionate them with a more interior bitterness than before. In none of the earlier stages of her sorrow had there been more demand upon her to control the common gestures and outbursts of grief, than when she sate in the light of that spring evening with her Son's dead Body on her lap, smoothing, anointing, and composing the countless prints of shame and suffering which had been worn so deeply into it. In vain for her were the birds trilling their even-song, the weight of the eclipse being taken off their blithe little hearts. In vain for her were the perfumes of the tender fig-leaves rising up in the cool air, and the

buds bursting greenly, and the tender shoots full of vernal beauty. Her grief was past nature's soothing. For her Flower had been cruelly gathered, and lay withered there upon her knee.

She performed her task as an act of religion, with grave assiduity, not delaying over it to satisfy the grief of which her heart was full. The dead Body seemed as obedient to her as ever the Babe had been in Bethlehem, obedient in all things but one. She told St. Bridget that the extended arms could not be closed, and laid by His side or crossed upon His breast. We ought rather to say they would not than they could not, be closed. He will not relinquish those outstretched arms which seem to invite the whole world into the utmost width of their embrace. There was room for all within them, a harbour large enough for all creation. If the lifting up of His Hands upon the Cross was an "evening sacrifice" to the Eternal Father, the outstretching of them was as it were a sacramental sign to men, that none were excluded from His invitation and His welcome. He would carry with Him to the tomb the form and figure of one crucified; and Mary understood why the arms were rigid, and forbore the gentle violence she was about to use. He must be swathed in the winding-sheet in that shape as well as may be, preaching large, wide, welcoming love even to the end. Mary must now take her last look of that dead Face. Mothers live lives in their last looks. Who shall tell what Mary's was like ? Who would have been surprised if the eyes of the dead had opened, and His lips parted, under the kindling and the quickening of that look? With heroic effort she has bound the napkin around His Head, and has folded the winding-sheet over the sweet Face. And now there is darkness indeed around her. The very dead Body had been a light and a support. She has put out the light herself. Her own hands have quenched the lamp, and she

stands facing the thick night. O brave woman! Hours of ecstatic contemplation over that silent-speaking Countenance would have passed like moments. But it was a time for religion, not for the indulgence of her tenderness; and she pierced her own heart through and through with the same hand with which she hid His Face. But, O Mary! thou seest that Face now, and art drinking thy fill of its beauty, and thou wilt do so for evermore, and never be satisfied, even when always satisfied, happy blessed Mother! -" The Foot of the Cross," 293-295, 306-310.

XXXVIII

THE BURIAL OF JESUS

THE shades of evening fall fast and silently round that Mother, sitting at the foot of the Cross with the covered Head of her dead Son upon her lap. The very earth is weary with the weight of that eventful day. The animals were fatigued after the panic of the eclipse, whose darkness they had mistaken for the night, so that the beasts slunk to their lairs, the birds to their roosts, and the lizards went to rest in the crevices of the rocks. Men themselves were outworn with sin and the impetuous activity of their own evil passions, while the scattered few who composed the Church were weary with shame, and fear, and sorrow, and the agitation of accumulated thoughts. The well-known sounds of night begin to succeed to the sharper and more frequent noises of the day. There is a divine light in the heart of Mary, more golden than that last lingering rim of departed sunset, that sun which seemed so glad to set after the burden of such a day, and she is resting on it for a moment, before she girds up her whole nature to meet her seventh sorrow and her last.

It was a strange station for a mother to choose for her repose, just at the foot of the cruel tree on which her Son had died, and which was yet bedewed with His Precious Blood. Yet it is also just the very spot, where, with Marylike instinct, the mourners of eighteen centuries have come to rest, and have found peace there, when there was no peace, at least for them, in any other corner of the earth. It is a place of spells, since Jesus hung there and since Mary sat there. Here tears have been dried, which it had seemed would never cease to flow. Here hearts have consented to live, which a while ago were fain to die. Here the widow has found another and a heavenly husband. The mother has had her lost children restored to her. The orphans have gone there in the dark, and when they were done sobbing, they found the arms of their new mother, Mary, round them. Here thousands of hearts have discovered how good a thing it was to have been broken; for through the rent of their own hearts they saw God. When Mary sat on that hill-top, and enthroned the dead Christ upon her knee, she left an inexhaustible legacy of blessings behind her to all generations, with the condition of residence on the top of Calvary attached to their enjoyment.

It was not therefore for herself, but for us, that she sat there, and rested for a moment. But the time has now come, and she signifies with calm self-collection to the disciples round to form the procession to the tomb. There was Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, John and Magdalen, the devout women who had come up to the Cross, some of the trusted servants of Joseph and Nicodemus, and to these was now added the converted centurion who, at the moment of our Lord's death, had confessed that He was the Son of God. Perhaps also some of the apostles and other disciples

136 may by this time, as some of the saints have conjectured, have been gathered to the Cross. It seemed sad to break up so fair a scene of beautiful sorrow; but it was time to fulfil the Scripture. With calm heroism, yet not without the direst martyrdom, Mary gave up the treasure which lay across her lap. Who had any right to touch Him but herself? Ah, Mother! thou knowest we have all of us got those rights now. He has become the property of the world, the inheritance of sinners, and thou thyself too art the universal Mother. What the poor old heathen called the earth, that art thou to us, and much more also. But she had borne Him into Egypt. Should she not bear Him also to the tomb? No, Mother! God hath given thee strength by miracle, that thou mightest suffer; but He will not give thee strength to do that which will be a consolation to thy woe! There is that other Joseph, haunting thee with his sweet look of reverence and love through these last two

The rude world intruded not upon the silence of that wonderful procession. The multitude had long since flowed back, like an ebb-tide, from that sacred hill. The earthquake had sobered many hearts, which diabolical possession had maddened in the morning. The crowded city had enough to think of for itself. Easter even will not put a term to the panic of this day. There are to be strange portents still. The joys of the Church are to be, now asafterwards, fresh troubles to the world. For there will be processions in the streets of Jerusalem, strange processions, such as will make men seek their homes, and close their doors, and speak low, and think of God. A shadow will lie over all hearts. The dead will walk. The earthquake had burst the tombs open, and like those impatient prognostics which so often usher in a divine work, had laid bare the

mysteries of thy sorrow. He and Nicodemus will bear the burden, while John and Magdalen will go along with thee.

bodies of the saints, who should rise with Christ. The old saints of the land, the dead of other generations, will go about the city, and be seen of many, with their beautiful threatening faces speaking unutterable silent things. Even already the memory of the day hung like a cold stone around the souls of many. In others it was burning like a hot restless fire, the harbinger of converting grace. Many wept, many more were sad, and all were weary, dulled by a shadow. oppressed by a divine terror. Hell had lighted a volcano in the people during the morning. Now it was burnt out, and human nature could hardly find its place again in many of the hearts from which it had been so awfully displaced. There was therefore no interruption from the city. The city was brooding over itself, like a disconsolate bird over its robbed nest. The very trumpets of Titus were almost in its ears, and might have been heard by prophetic listening. Poor Jerusalem! God has loved thee long, and loved thee with a mysterious fondness; but to-day's disloyalty has filled up thy measure, and thy doom has received its orders, and is now upon its way. From the top of that hill, brown in the dusky twilight, they are carrying to His tomb the Body of thy rejected King!

What awful shapes and shadows, of history, of prophecy, of dim divine decrees, gather like waving banners in the darkness, round that sacred procession! Has creation come to this, that a few faithful creatures are bearing the Dead Creator to a tomb in the rock, and that a mortal Mother, who numbers less than fifty years, is chief mourner there as the veritable Mother of the Eternal? The songless angels are marshalled round in serried phalanxes.

Their science almost makes them afraid, so overwhelming is the mystery. Now they have passed over the grave of Adam, the first man, in which the Cross had been set up. The Soul of Jesus had already gone to Adam to give him

the Beatific Vision. Now his descendants were treading on his grave. His daughter Mary, the second Eve, had been sitting there awhile ago with the second Adam on her lap. The bones and skulls of malefactors, luckless tokens of the fall, strewed their path, half bedded in the tufts of faded grass, or lying loose upon the smooth herbage which the goats had cropped. They are descending now into a garden, another Eden, to plant a tree there in the rock, better incomparably than all the trees of that old Paradise, better even than the tree of life, and which should bloom in three days with an inconceivable blooming. It was a garden where the vines grew, and the olive-trees dropped fatness. But this tree should give forth wine more gladdening to the heart of man than any which ever bled in the wine-press from the vine were it from the rarest clusters of Engaddi. It should yield oil, as no olive ever yielded it, an oil to heal all wounds, and to be the inexhaustible balsam of the world. There were no flowers on earth like that withered one upon the bier, none to compare with it for beauty or for fragrance, none that should have so vernal a spring as He should have when but another sun was set. So they went onward to the garden, a whole cloud of divinest mysteries, accomplished types, fulfilled prophecies, historical consummations, resting on them as they went: and over all was poured the soft light of the paschal moon, hanging low in the western heavens, as if it were the light escaped from Mary's heart which was making all the scenes so deeply sad, so sadly beautiful.

Slowly they went, and in silence as soft as the foot of midnight itself. If they had sung psalms, the restless city might have heard. But in truth what psalms were there which they could sing? Not even the inspired harp of David could have shed sweet sounds fit for a dirge for such a funeral. No one spoke in all that company. What should they say? What words could have expressed their

thoughts? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." But there are times when the heart is over-full, and then it cannot speak. So it was with that procession. A deeper shadow of sorrow had never fallen upon men, than the gloom which fell on those who now were wending from the top of Calvary to the garden-tomb. There was grief enough to have darkened a whole world in Mary's single heart. Human suffering is not infinite, but it is near upon it; and she had come by this time to its very uttermost extremity. There was only one sacrifice she could make now, and she was in the very act of making it. She was going to put away from herself and out of her own power, to hide in a rocky tomb and let Roman soldiers come and keep watch over it, that Body which though it was dead was more than life to her. Then indeed she would stand upon the highest pinnacle of evangelical poverty, to which God had promised such mighty things. She would only keep for herself that which she could not part with, and would not have parted with if she could, a broken heart utterly submerged in such waters of bitterness as had never flowed round any living creature heretofore. There never would have been joy on this planet again, if her accumulated woe had been divided into little parcels, and distributed to each child of Adam as he comes into the world. Men look with eyes of admiring wonder at adventurous travellers and the successful explorers of unknown lands. Look now at Mary, as she closes the funeral procession. That woman is a creature of the Most High more exalted than any angel in heaven. The throne that awaits her is one of the marvels of the heavenly court. She is as sinless as the sunbeam, and her empire is over all creation. The Three Persons of the undivided Trinity will themselves perform her coronation. But she has explored now all the vast realms of pain. She has sounded the depths of every heart-ache man can know. She

has traversed vast regions of suffering which none ever traversed before her, and whither none can follow her. She has been with the Incarnate Word in abysses of His Passion, which theology has never named, because not even saints have ever imagined their existence. She has exhausted all the possibilities of mortal anguish. Her dolours have outreached the tall science of the angels. They are known to none but Jesus and herself. At this present moment she is drawing near to the term of that which is so nearly infinite. The mystical border is close at hand. The outside of possible suffering, like the end of space, is inconceivable. A few more footsteps, and she will have reached that indescribable point of human life. Who would have dreamed of such a possible suffering as the Dead Body of the Living God? There is only one suffering beyond it: it is the parting with that Body, and going back into the world alone, in such a solitude as never creature knew before.

But now the garden-tomb is reached, the new Eden of the second Adam. It was hewn in the solid rock, and was new. Joseph had meant it for himself. But no man had ever lain there yet. All things were fitting, and full of all manner of meanings and proprieties. The tomb of this new Joseph was to be to Him what the arms of the other Joseph had often been before, His resting-place awhile, when Mary had to part with Him. But in those days there had never been such partings as this was to be. Mary enters the tomb with Joseph. It was his help she chose. Her hands arranged everything. How gently they lowered His Head into the tomb! As to His arms, perhaps they now allowed her to close them to the Body,-or perhaps, if there was room, He rested even in the grave with that wide crucified embrace, ready to receive a whole world of sinners. We are not told. She adjusts and composes the winding-sheet, and puts the Feet together, which had been so painfully together

those three hours upon the Cross. The instruments of the Passion too she takes, and kisses them, and deposits them in the tomb. There is no unnecessary delay over each action, such as marks the weakness of common grief. All was done in order, assiduity, and silence. Then came perhaps the last look. Perhaps she lifted up the cloth to see that the moving of the Body had not discomposed the venerable features. How pale it must have looked by the wan torchlight inside that rocky tomb! The eyes were closed. whose single look had converted Peter. The lips were shut that but awhile ago uttered those seven marvellous words upon the Cross, the sound of which had not yet died out of her listening ears. Slowly the cloth was replaced; and on her knees she made her last act of adoration of that lifeless Body. Never surely had any anguish so awful, any woe so utterly superhuman, desolated the soul of living creature. There have been many last looks in the world. Many graves have closed on earth, shutting in worlds of hope and love, and imprisoning often more of the survivor's life than death has robbed from the departed. Yet none has ever come nigh this. It stands alone, a grief without a parallel; because she who mourned and He whom she mourned were alike incomparable. Perhaps in none of her dolours was there any single isolated moment that, for accumulated and intense woe, could be reckoned along with this. She was widowed and orphaned as none else were before. She sank down in depths of widowhood and orphanhood which had never opened to anyone else. But what are father and mother and husband and child compared with an Incarnate God? To be fatherless, motherless, husbandless, and childless, how little a measure of grief do these dismal words represent, compared with that for which there is no real word! For a soul to be Christless, is simply heathenism and hell. For Mary, His own Mother, to be Christless, and on the night

of such a day-Oh, the sorrow lies out dark before us, like the sea at night, and we know no more !- "The Foot of the Cross," 338-345.

XXXXIX

THE DESOLATE MOTHER

THE loneliness of the sixth dolour had not yet reached the point of desolation, because Mary still had the companionship of the Body. It became desolation, when the great stone was rolled to the door of the monument, and she went forth from the garden of His sepulture. This has been a well-known moment in the grief of all of us. All was not over when death was over. We spoke of the lifeless frame in the masculine or feminine, as if the body was the real self of the one we loved. The house was not forlorn, at least not utterly forlorn, though it was darkened and silent. The dead furnished it, peopled it with one exclusive growing life, and filled it with a mysterious attraction. It made home more home. If was now a consecrated home. It had but been a common home before. Oh, there was such manifold companionship in the dead! Its white face was so eloquent. It did not tell of pain just passed, and the gnawing of hungry disease, and the blight of pestilence. But it spoke of old times, of simple childish years. It was a very resurrection of bygone looks, of almost forgotten expressions, of innocent youthful pleasantness of countenance, blooming above death like the snowdrops above the hoarfrost. The compressed lips smiled at us. The closed eyes looked at us, without opening. The blue-veined hands were full of meaning. It was a dark hour when the coffin closed, but the spell was not gone yet. The moment of desolation did not come when the blue spires of incense up-curled themselves out of the damp grave, and the clods rattled on the coffin lid, and the hollow sound was like a frightening echo of eternity. But it came when the mourner set his first step again on the threshold of his door, having left the partner of his life, or the child of his hopes, or the mother of his boyhood, behind him in the grave. Then the house was empty indeed, and his heart was empty too, and desolate. If we substitute Mary for ourselves, and Jesus for the love we lost, and make allowance for those wide disparities, like grief was Mary's when she turned away from the gardentomb. This it is within our compass to understand, and there are dark days in our own past to testify to its reality.

"The Foot of the Cross," 355, 356.

XL

THE MANGER AND THE TOMB

Mary was surrounded in the seventh dolour by images of the Sacred Infancy. These were a twofold fountain of sorrow, both in their contrasts and their similitudes. Her Son's imprisonment in the tomb was an image to her of the nine months He had spent in her blessed womb. But she had borne Him then herself over the hill-country of Judea, with swiftest exaltation, while each thought was a Magnificat within her soul. Joseph of Arimathea reminded her of him who was chosen of all men by the Eternal Father to be the Foster-father of Jesus. But he had gone to sleep peaceably with his head on the bosom of Jesus, while Joseph of Arimathea was just reversing the pleasant sadness of that older mystery. When she laid Jesus in the tomb, and arranged the winding-sheet, she remembered the crib of the manger, wherein she had laid Him at Bethlehem. But

between the crib and the tomb there was all the vast interval which lies between the poles of Christian devotion, Christmas and Passiontide. The two mysteries were so alike, and yet so different! He was more helpless now than ever He was then. What was loveliest obedience then is rigid passiveness now. His silence was voluntary then; so is it now, but with a different kind of will. He had noticed her then: He takes no notice now. When He slept as a Babe, and His eyes were closed, she knew that He was thinking, loving, worshipping, all the while; and His sleep was in itself a beauty, and a charm. But now the heart was cold and motionless, worshipful because of its union with the Godhead, but not beating with conscious love of her. They had had one strange union since His death. It was when she had knelt with Him extended on her arms, and they two together had made the figure of one Crucifix, and it was neither altogether Jesus who was crucified, nor altogether Mary, but God's one victim out of two lives. That was a figure with a strong divine light upon it, never to be forgotten, though we should soon sink out of our depth in its theology of love.

Yet the Passion was there as well as the Infancy. They met upon that ground. That marble body, many-streaked with intertwisted red and livid blue, was no monument of Bethlehem. The whole Passion was elaborately written out upon His limbs; nay, it is gorgeously illuminated on His Hands and Feet and Side this hour in heaven. Those instruments of the Passion too, those precious relics, which are deposited in the tomb, tell not of Bethlehem and Nazareth, but of Jerusalem and Calvary, of the Prætorium and of Golgotha. Others touching, handling, carrying Him rather than herself,—this painful characteristic of the Passion, which had cut so deep into her soul in the fourth dolour, was renewed in the sixth and seventh. It was a

sort of token of the presence of the Passion. But tokens were hardly needed and, if present, were scarcely perceptible, in a mystery which breathed the aromatic bitter of the Passion in all its bearings and in each minutest incident. In the Sacred Infancy she had none to lean their weight on her weariness and weakness; for she and Joseph both leaned on Jesus, and rest and peace and joy are all one abiding thing to those who lean on Him. But she had to carry the Church in her heart at the Passion. When Jesus died, Peter, the Rock, leaned his repentant faith and love on hers. She upheld by her gentle bravery both John and Magdalen. Joseph and Nicodemus would scarcely have had nerve to detach the body from the Cross, if she had not been there to inspire them with her own tender fortitude. Yet this leaning of others made her heart ache. It was a fresh sorrow of itself. It multiplied the number of dear hearts in which she had to suffer, while it was also a strain upon her own. The Passion reached its height in Mary, not when the Soul of Jesus sank through the greensward at the foot of the Cross, but during that final moment at the tomb.

Here also the Three Days' Loss, that mystery which shines apart, finds something like its fellow. The essence of the sorrow is the same in both cases—It is the loss of Jesus. The time which the loss endures is mysteriously the same. There is the same absence of human agency and secondary causes. The occupations of the absent Jesus are not unlike in both cases. In the first He was illuminating the doctors of His nation. In the second He was giving beatific light in the limbus of the Fathers, the older doctors of His people. There was a Joseph to sorrow with Mary at the tomb, as there had been a Joseph to sorrow with her in the temple; and both Josephs were the choice of God Himself. The nature of the suffering was the same in both cases, because it came from a divine abandonment. Desolation was equally

the form of sorrow then and now. She had lost Him both times in the same place, just outside the gates of Jerusalem. There can be little doubt that the Three Days' Loss was a prophetical foreshadowing of the present separation. But there was one notable exception to all these similitudes. The darkness in the seventh dolour arose from the impossibility of consolation. The darkness in the third was a mysterious ordeal of supernatural ignorance. Here she knew everything. She had watched the Passion to its close with heroic fidelity. She had embalmed Him herself. She had helped to lay Him in the tomb. She knew where He was, and how He had been lost, and she knew of the Resurrection that was to come on Easter morning. But as one deep calleth to another in the ways of God, so doubtless the third dolour calls to the seventh, and the echoes answer to the call. The voices of both agree in telling us that they both have abysses which we cannot sound, and that beyond the deep places, in which we have nearly lost ourselves, there are deeper places still which we suspect not. . . .

Look once more at the great Mother as she leaves the garden of the sepulture. Eve going forth from Eden was not more sorrow-laden, and bore with her into the unpeopled earth a heart less broken and less desolate. That woe-worn woman is the strength of the Church, the queen of the apostles, the true mother of all that outspread world, over which the blue mantle of darkness is falling fast and silently. Sleep on, tired world! sleep on beneath the paschal moon, and the stars that are brightening as it sets; thy mother's heart watches and wakes for thee!—"The Foot of the Cross," 356-358, 378.

XLI

THE RESURRECTION AND THE RISEN LIFE

WHILE the shame had been in the light of day, on the bare hill-top, and in the sight of hostile multitudes, the Resurrection was accomplished in the grey of early dawn, without ministers or witnesses but a group of holy angels who needed neither proof nor evidence. Here is the same propensity to a Hidden Life, which our Lord vouchsafes to manifest everywhere. Preparations are even made beforehand for the more complete concealment of this glorious mystery. Men are allowed to remember that He had predicted His Resurrection, and to suspect that His apostles will steal His Body away, and falsely assert that He has risen; and the guards who are set to watch are bribed to withhold such evidence as they could have given, and which they themselves could not have explained. Thus in the most natural way did our Lord contrive to hide the splendour of His Resurrection. But if, as might well be conceived, human eyes were unworthy to behold that surpassing mystery, we might expect that when risen He would manifest Himself in His strength, as He had manifested Himself in His weakness. The Resurrection was the grand evidence of His religion. The primary object for which the college of the apostles was instituted, and the vacancy of Judas filled up, was to bear testimony to the Resurrection, in that they had seen and conversed with Jesus Risen. . . .

But if it was so important that the evidence of this mystery should be established to the satisfaction of the whole world, if the salvation of countless souls depended upon it, if the apostles were appointed mainly or at least primarily because of it, the Forty Days of His Risen Life will at least be marked by some degree of additional publicity. Just the contrary. It is the most mysteriously hidden life of all. Bethlehem was notoriety and Nazareth an outward life compared with this. He certainly remained on earth for forty days; but where He was and how He spent the time we do not know. He kept appearing here and there, from time to time, now to one, now to another, one while to a few, another while to many. Some fourteen of these gracious apparitions are recorded. Even as appearances they are filled with secrecy and concealment. When He appeared to the two disciples going to Emmaus, He only disclosed Himself as He was vanishing. When He showed Himself to Magdalene, it was under the species of a gardener, not His own. When He appeared at the lake, they did not know it was He, and then it flashed upon them, and they cried, It is the Lord! At another apparition, while many believed, some doubted. What passed between His apostles and Himself respecting the kingdom of God, the constitution of the Church, the matter and the form of the sacraments, and the like, was not committed to the publicity of the Written Word but shrouded in the guise of apostolical tradition. What else He did and where He went we cannot tell.

In old times there was an idea that He had gone all over the earth, touching everywhere with His blessed Feet the spots where afterwards an altar should be erected and the Mass offered, so consecrating the sites of all His churches beforehand. This was simply a pious and devotional thought, as it does not appear that any revelations are quoted in its behalf. It was a beautiful expression of the days of poetic faith, of those times of pilgrimage, when the Holy Land seemed all in all to men, when they brought shiploads of its sacred earth to European countries, and were yearning to make every hallowed spot into a Palestine. In truth, the Forty Days are hidden from us by our Lord Himself. All we can conjecture from analogy is that our Blessed Lady was in some way concerned with them, and that perhaps the greatest portion of His time was spent with her, in St. John's house, renewing and repeating the privacy of the house of Nazareth, or the Forty Days of Bethlehem before the Purification.

But the Forty Days came to an end; and the mystery of the Ascension came. He left the world almost as secretly as He came into it. His Mother and a little band were the favoured few whom He admitted to witness the mystery; and so, three hours after midday, from sunny Olivet He rose up to heaven in the calmness of His own divine power, attended by a multitudinous retinue of angels keeping holy-day, and encompassed with the first fruits of His triumph, the souls of forty centuries liberated from Limbus and from Purgatory, and bearing up with Him those beautiful anticipations of the general resurrection, the bodies of the saints that rose with Him and walked the streets of Jerusalem on Easter Day. A cloud received Him out of the sight of earth; and entering heaven, He placed His Human Nature in unimaginable exaltation at the Right Hand of the Father, where the heavens shall contain it in its proper species until the restitution of all things.

Yet even then the unconquerable propensity, as we should call it if speaking of one of ourselves, or the divine characteristic, as religiously speaking we should term it, manifests itself still more and more. He had Himself preluded to it by words that He dropped as if by chance, and by assurances and predictions that sounded only like the soothing speeches of affectionate consolation. When hiddenness seemed at an end, then it began as it never

had been before. When secrecy, to our limited ideas, was impossible, then was it deepened and darkened more than ever; and by a series of divine operations it became a secrecy the most fascinatingly beautiful and magnificently complete that can be conceived. From His public glory in heaven He descended at once the whole way to the sweetly-imagined privacy of the Consecrated Host. For His worship of sight above He took the worship of faith below. Not once for all did He do this, but, with intense delight renewed each hour, He descends and is ever descending into the lowly bosom of those little common trivial creatures of Bread and Wine, or rather into the bosom of that nothingness where they have just vacated what they filled.

Thus did everything which, it appeared, would stay His fondness for the hidden life, give Him as it were a fresh spring, a new impulse, to bury Himself deeper and deeper in His own creation. The Incarnation hid more than it disclosed. It added new mysteries instead of explaining old ones. His obligation to begin His Father's work glided into a reason for another delay of eighteen years. His public life did but illuminate His love of privacy. His Passion, which should have drawn forth His Divinity, drove it in. The mystery of the Resurrection, by the publication of which the world was to be converted, was enveloped in profoundest secrecy. The Ascension, which looked like a closing triumph of the war, only began His Sacramental Life, the most impenetrable mystery of all.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 277, 279-282.

XLII

THE ASCENSION OF OUR BLESSED LORD

GREEN Nazareth was not a closer hiding-place than the risen glory of the Forty Days. As of old, the Precious Blood clung round the sinless Mother. Like a stream that will not leave its parent chain of mountains, but laves them incessantly with many an obstinate meandering, so did the Blood of Jesus, shed for all hearts of men, haunt the single heart of Mary. Fifteen times, or more, in those Forty Days. it came out from under the shadow of Mary's gladness, and gleamed forth in beautiful apparitions. Each of them is a history in itself, and a mystery, and a revelation. Never did the Sacred Heart say or do such ravishing things as during those Forty Days of its Risen Life. The Precious Blood had almost grown more human from having been three days in the keeping of the angels. But, as it had mounted Calvary on Good Friday, so now it mounts Olivet on Ascension Thursday, and disappears into heaven amidst the whiteness of the silver clouds. It had been but a decree in heaven before, a divine idea, an eternal compassion, an inexplicable complacency of the life of God. It returns thither a Human Life, and is throned at the Right Hand of the Father for ever in right of its inalienable union with the Person of the Word. There is no change in the Unchangeable. But in heaven there had never been change like this before, nor ever will be again. The changes of the Great Doom can be nothing compared to the exaltation of the Sacred Humanity of the Eternal Word. The very worship of the glorious spirits was changed, so changed that the angels themselves cannot say how it is that no change has passed on God. Somehow the look of change has enhanced the magnificence of the divine immutability, and has given a new gladness to their adoration of its unspeakable tranquillity.—" The Precious Blood," 155, 156.

XLIII

OTHER WORLDS THAN OURS

May we be forgiven, if we say a word or two of other worlds of which we know nothing? Their possibilities at least will help to complete our idea of the empire of the Word's Humanity. The question of the inhabitation of the other planets, or of the distant central stars, by reasonable creatures, is one which it does not appear likely that science will ever settle, and on which revelation has not authentically spoken. Minds, which love analogy, find a difficulty in conceiving that all the orbs which night braids upon her forehead, and yet which are still invisibly looking down upon us through the white light of day, should be meant for nothing more than the lamps of a Chinese feast, or a colossal game of material laws, and a puzzle of interchanging attractions and repulsions. Gigantic wildernesses of matter. untenanted by moral agents, appear out of keeping with the analogies of creation. On the other hand, minds to whom theological truth is almost the only attractive truth. and, rightly considered, is properly itself all truth, are met by inferences from the mystery of the Incarnation, which seem to them irresistible, and yet which will not fit in with the notion of this world, the scene of the Incarnation, being but one, and a very insignificant one, in a crowd of reasonable worlds.

But the man of science must be less bigoted, and leave more room for fresh analogies, such as perhaps he has

never dreamed of yet: and the theologian must beware of narrowness, the disease to which he is most subject, and must eschew that miserable haste of little minds to close questions which legitimate authority has left wide open. A theologian, above other men, should be one who can take into his large heart with genial sympathy, rather than with critical distrust, the whole of the century in which he lives. Surely it would be a downright grief to any thinking and heaven-hoping man to dream for one moment that any, the least, of God's mysteries had room enough in our widest systems, and was not a thousand-times bigger truth than it seems to those whose intelligence magnifies it most. The doctrine of the Incarnation is in no peril from the inhabitants of a million other worlds. God's centres are different from ours, and the Sacred Humanity, assumed on earth, would remain the centre of all those numberless creations, just as it is now the Centre, Head, King, Type, and Cause of the angelical creation, which needs not a material home at all, much less has any necessary connection with the matter of this particular planet.

The dogma of the Incarnation is not then committed to any view upon the plurality of worlds; while at the same time the scriptural revelation of the existence of the angels, and their manifold relations to men, may breed in the theologian's mind a presumption that the silence of the Scripture upon beings, who, if they exist, must be with the angels and ourselves of the one family of Christ, is against the notion that other orbs are yet inhabited by reasonable beings. Nevertheless, as I have already suggested in another work, the modern discoveries of geology seem at once to permit the theologian to take the view to which he is perhaps most inclined, and also to meet the common objection on the other side of the unlikelihood of so many huge bright worlds being left untenanted.

Many writers have argued, as if those who held the other planets to be unpeopled now must hold also that they would remain unpeopled; and hence much fallacy and confusion have arisen. To repeat what I have said elsewhere, we have no right to conclude as certain that the creation of rational beings took place all at one time. The corporeal and incorporeal creations were simultaneous; but not all corporeal or all incorporeal species. Indeed we know that the angels belonged to an elder creation than ourselves. Man's creation was subsequent to the creation of the very matter out of which God formed his body. So that the only instance, with which we are acquainted, would favour the supposition that God, in His adorable love of order, might begin creation in one spot, and go on to others, as He has done with angels and men, and with men in their various dispensations. After the angels He came to men and began with earth. There is no intrinsic unlikelihood of His beginning with our system, and with this particular planet in our system, which can be set for a moment against what we know at all events to be a fact, that God chose to take the particular nature of man, who is the inhabitant of this planet, and to choose this orb as the scene of His Incarnation, and the locality of His redeeming sacrifice. From this orb, and from this system, He may proceed to others, and so spread reasonable life and worship through starry space.

The old argument, that it is unlikely such bright worlds should not now be furnishing God's glory with reasonable worship, might just as much have been urged against the unpeopled earth through all those interminable epochs, during which geology thinks it can show it to us as with incredible slowness ripening for the habitation of men. We cannot talk much of analogies, when we know but one case. Yet the one case of earth, as interpreted by

geology, discloses God to us as conducting His designs in creation by a circuitous series of preparations, of such gigantic dimensions as almost to unsettle our belief in the sobriety of science.

But, whatever comes of these speculations, if the other worlds were or are inhabited by moral agents, the probability is as irresistible, as a probability can be, of their being under the Sacred Humanity of Jesus as their Head. They would belong to Him in an especial way as the Word, through the Word's relation to creatures; and it is surely unlikely and unanalogous that He should be to some worlds as incarnate, and to some as not incarnate, particularly when we consider that He is Head of the angels in His Human Nature, and that they among themselves are in reality not one family in their nature, in the same sense as men are, but an immense number of species, one possibly differing more from another than a stellar creature would differ from us, or we from a supposed inhabitant of another planet.

Creatures in other worlds would probably be created in a state of grace, like the two creations of men and angels. It looks as if it were a part of God's magnificence that it should be so. But grace would hardly come from the Word in His one Nature now that He has two, when it did not do so, as we think the more probable opinion, when His Human Nature was only foreseen. If these worlds, thus created in a state of grace, are unfallen, they are probably standing upright by the grace of the Incarnate Word. If they are fallen, and not restored, whether the fall was partial as with the angels, or universal as with men by their descent, the Incarnation probably would mingle with the fall, as it did in the case of the angels. If they are fallen and restored, for the same reasons we should believe that they were restored by Him. The locality of His Bloodshedding on

this particular planet would be no objection, as the angels, although not redeemed by Him, as either not needing or not being allowed redemption, have nevertheless gained by His merits. They who meditate much on the Unity of God, and such meditation is the marked characteristic of those who have an especial devotion to the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, will almost daily see new probabilities that the family of the glorified would be one. Poles further apart than men and angels could hardly have to be brought together. Yet they are brought together under one Head, and it is in His Human Nature that the Word is Head of both. If then the marvellous work of the Hypostatic Union is adequate for this, why multiply Headships, and so lose the unity of the family, which is the grand shadow of the Unity of God?

We have hinted at these speculations, not as if they were of importance in themselves, but as showing that the idea of the Incarnation, as here brought forward, finds no difficulties in those problems which have been started by the scientific controversies of the day. Thus, wherever we look, whether with upturned heart and eye we blind ourselves by looking into heaven, or range through the manifold kingdoms of earth, or explore the holy hospitals of purgatory, or venture to hang over the dread abyss of the condemned, or imagine theologies for worlds from which we are cut off by gulfs of mpassable, unnavigable space, everywhere we see the Sacred Humanity to be the Primal Creature of God, to be what no other creature is or can be, and to contain and imply all other creatures in itself with a certain sovereign eminence, which belongs to it in right of its eternal predestination.

There are fertile times when a man's thoughts float out from him, like the gushings of his life, becoming part of truth rather than expressing it, and making the mind a worshipper rather than a teacher. It is in such seasons that

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we see how all things are theology, and how in it all other sciences regain themselves rather than melt away. It is in such seasons that the chambers of space open out to us, their far-off walls dissolving into clearest ether, and we behold the vast empire of the Sacred Humanity running out with its glorious promontories into the infinite life of God, where we had never dared to dream. It is in such seasons that we hear the invisible, although we cannot see it; and thenceforth the next world haunts us here with a teasing like that of an unrecovered thought.—" Bethlehem," 294-299.

XLIV

THE EMPIRE OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

God made the angels and the stars. The starry world is an overwhelming thing to think of. Its distances are so vast that they frighten us. The number of its separate worlds is so enormous that it bewilders us. Imagine a ray of light, which travels one hundred and ninety-two thousand miles in a second; and yet there are stars whose light would take a million of years to reach the earth. We know of two hundred thousand stars down to the ninth magnitude. In one single cluster of stars, eighteen millions of stars have been discovered between the tenth and eleventh magnitudes. Of these clusters men have already discovered more than four thousand. Each of these stars is not a planet, like the earth, but a sun, like our sun, and perhaps with planet, round it, like ourselves. Of these suns we know of some which are one hundred and forty-six times brighter than our sun. What an idea all this gives us of the grandeur and magnificence of God! Yet we know that all these stars were created for Jesus and because of Jesus. He is the head and firstborn of all creation. Mary's Son is the king His Precious Blood has something to do with of the stars. all of them. Just as it merited graces for the angels, so does it merit blessings for the stars. If they have been inhabited before we were, or are inhabited now, or will at some future time begin to be inhabited, their inhabitants, whether fallen and redeemed, or unfallen and so not needing to be redeemed, will owe immense things to the Precious Blood. Yet earth, our little humble earth, will always have the right to treat the Precious Blood with special endearments, because it is its native place. When the angels, as they range through space, see our little globe twinkling with its speck of coloured light, it is to them as the little Holy House in the hollow glen of Nazareth, more sacred and more glorious than the amplest palaces in starry space.

God made the stars; and, whether the earth was made by itself from the first, or was once part of the sun and thrown off from it like a ring, God made the earth also, and shaped it, and adorned it, and filled it with trees and animals; and then looked upon His work, and it shone forth so beautifully with the light of His own perfections, that He blessed it, and, glorying in it, declared that it was very good. We know what an intense pleasure men take in looking at beautiful scenery. When we feel this pleasure, we ought to feel that we are looking at a little revelation of God, a very true one although a little one, and we ought to think of God's complacency when He beheld the scenery of the primeval earth, and rejoiced in what He saw. There was no sin then. To God's eye earth was all the more beautiful, because it was innocent and the dwelling-place of innocence. Then sin came. Why God let it come we do not know. We shall probably know in heaven. We are certain, however, that in some way or other it was more glorious for Him, and better for us, that evil should be permitted. Some

people trouble themselves about this. It does not trouble me at all. Whatever God does must of course be most right. My understanding it would not make it more right; neither could I do anything to mend matters, if I understood it ever so well. Every one should keep in his own place: it is the creature's place to believe, adore, and love. Sin came. With sin came many fearful consequences. This beautiful earth was completely wrecked. It went on through space in the sunshine as before; but in God's sight and in the destiny of its inhabitants, it was all changed. Jesus could no longer come in a glorious and unsuffering Incarnation. Mary would have to die; and, though she was sinless, she would need to be redeemed with a single and peculiar redemption, a redemption of prevention, not of rescue. She also, the immaculate Mother and Queen of creation, must be bought by the Precious Blood. Had it not been for Jesus, the case of earth would have been hopeless, now that sin had come. God would have let it go, as He let the angels go. It would have been all hateful and dark in His sight, as the home of the fallen spirits is. But it was not so. Earth was dimmed but it was not darkened. disfigured but not blackened. God saw it through the Precious Blood, as through a haze; and there it lay with a dusky glory over it, like a red sunset, up to the day of Christ. No sooner had man sinned than the influence of the Precious Blood began to be felt. There was no adorable abruptness on the part of God, as with the angels. His very upbraiding of Adam was full of paternal gentleness. With His punishment He mingled promises. He spoke of Mary, Eye's descendant, and illumined the penance of our first parents by the prophecy of Jesus. As the poor offending earth lay then before the sight of God, so does it lie now; only that the haze is more resplendent, since the Sacrifice on Calvary was offered. The Precious Blood covers it all

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over, like a sea or like an atmosphere. It lies in a beautiful crimson light for ever, a light softening the very shades, beautifying the very gloom. God does not see us as we see ourselves, but in a brighter, softer light. We are fairer in His sight than we are in our own, notwithstanding His exceeding sanctity, because He sees us in the Blood of His dear Son. This is a consolation, the balm of which is not easily exhausted. We learn a lesson from it also. Our view of creation should be like God's view. We should see it, with all its countless souls, through the illuminated mist of the Precious Blood. Its spiritual scenery should be before us, everything everywhere, goldenly red.—"The Precious Blood," 10-13.

BOOK II

THE GOSPEL OF THE EUCHARIST



XLV

THE EXTENSION OF THE INCARNATION

THE great mercy designed in the Blessed Sacrament is the renewal, and not the renewal only, but the extension also, of the Incarnation. The presence of the Eternal Word made Man, residing in His own creation, and sharing and participating in it, was the greatest gift which God could confer upon the world; because the Hypostatic Union was the closest intimacy which was possible between ourselves and Him.

The sun shone upon the Incarnate Word, the moon lighted up the mountain steeps where He was at prayer, the wind stirred His hair, and the ground was pressed by His feet. Silence listened to His words as if it were enchanted, and they fell upon the thirsty hearts of men like dews of grace. When the day was done, and sleep stole gratefully over tired nature, it ventured to lay its hand upon the heavy eyelids of the Incarnate Word, and He slept. The elements obeyed Him, or He obeyed them, as He willed. He was a sight, a sound, a touch, a fragrance in the world, such as never had been before, and which was worth infinite creations, nay, far transcended all possible

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creations whatsoever. If the eye of the Eternal Father had looked with merciful complacency over the virgin world, when it came fresh from His creative hand, and had deigned to pronounce it beautiful and good and blessed, how beautiful and good and blessed must it have been then, when He who was co-equal and co-eternal with Himself was therein, having assumed a created nature, so that human actions of infinite price and of unspeakable loveliness and of divinest grace were issuing from Him at all hours. From the very moment of the Incarnation, creation became quite a different thing from what it ever was before, simply from the presence of our Lord in the flesh.

Now God's gifts are "without repentance." It is not His way, blessed be His holv Name! to withdraw what He has once given. There is nothing retrograde in the course of the divine compassions. One mercy is superseded by a greater; it does not retire, and give place to a less. Such is the royal munificence and exuberance of heavenly love. Hence to withdraw from the earth the presence of the Incarnate Word, once conferred upon it, would be indeed to leave the children of men orphans; our Lord Himself implies this, when reading the anxious thoughts of their hearts, He said to His disciples: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." Either, then, our Lord's visible presence upon earth was to be continued, or its place was to be supplied by a presence every way as real and substantial, and of a higher, more befitting, and more spiritual character.

Indeed, human life as God has ordained it in the world would have become impossible, if the visible presence of Jesus had continued, when His resurrection had been proclaimed, His faith taught, and His Church established. It must have given rise to an entirely new state of things. and to laws of life, of moral life, as different from the

present, as life in Jupiter or Saturn would be in physical respects. The doom of the world would have been hastened and precipitated. The presence of Jesus, conversant with men, would have been a touchstone which would have driven all mankind very speedily either into the reprobation of the Jews or into the grace of the apostles. All wickedness would have put on the awful characteristics of the wickedness during the Passion; and all the probations of life would have centred in the one trial of rejecting or accepting the visible mission of Christ. Besides, the whole population of the world would have been thrown in vehement and irresistible pilgrimage upon one region, and such social and political consequences would have ensued as must have utterly destroyed the equilibrium of the world. Under the present dispensation of things earth is not capable of enduring a transformation into a sensible heaven.

Moreover, it was necessary for our Lord's own friends, that His visible Presence should have performed its transient mission, and be discontinued, and the heavens contain Him until the consummation of all things. "It is expedient for you that I go away," were His own words to the apostles. For, as several of the ancient fathers as well as the modern doctors of the mystical life teach, they had become attached to His visible presence with an attachment which not only impeded their own progress in spirituality, but was not so honourable to Him as the profound adoration mingled with sweet familiar love, which His absence and the descent of the Holy Ghost would pour into their souls. Thus it was not only expedient for them that He should go away, because for them and for us, all things considered, the descent of the Holy Ghost was a more fitting and so a more excellent thing than the continuance of His visible presence, but also because its place would be supplied by another presence of His own dear Self, more

wonderful and more excellent and more spiritual than His visible presence had been. So much was there in those few words: "A little while and you shall not see Me, and again a little while and you shall see Me, because I go to the Father!"

It was necessary then, it was in the usual course of divine gifts, that His new presence should exceed His former one; and this is His presence in the Blessed Sacrament. It was not precisely our Lord beautiful, or our Lord gentle, or patient, or consoling, or holy, or powerful, that earth could not do without and wanted back again. It was not precisely the Babe of Bethlehem, or the Boy of Nazareth, or the Man of Calvary, without whom heavenly love seemed as if it must faint and die away upon the earth, when the mystery of the Ascension left it all widowed, leaning its whole weight on the prayers and presence of His Immaculate Mother, the queen of the apostles. It was the Word Incarnate, it was Jesus Himself simply, it was the Human Flesh and Blood which He had taken to Himself and which men had touched and handled, and had been straightway healed and forgiven: this it was which we wanted, Him as incarnate, Him one of whose natures made Him our Brother, and Him with that nature whereby He was our Brother; and thus it is that we receive Him in the Blessed Sacrament. It is His Incarnation which is our stay, our blessing, our love, our consolation, in His new sacramental residence amongst us; and as in each Mass He is ever renewing and reproducing His Incarnation. it comes to us, as in the mysteries of the Sacred Infancy, day after day with all the novelty and freshness of His first coming.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 135-139.

XLVI

THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

JESUS returned again to us in the Blessed Sacrament, What a mystery this is, looking at it merely as a return, without adverting to its own intrinsic mysteriousness. When He rose, dear Saviour of mankind! He lingered upon earth, as though He was loath to leave it. Who can think of those Forty Days without a hot heart or delightful tears? Then, when He had ascended and placed His Human Nature on the exalted throne due to its eminent merits. His eye was cast downward on His Church, on Stephen before the Council, or Paul on the greensward by Damascus, or wherever else necessity or sorrow drew His loving look. He vouchsafed to seem as if He hankered after earth. Surrounded as He was by spotless sanctity, human and angelic, He still leaned towards the sinful and the low. The angels themselves had caught the spirit of His Sacred Heart. They came to rejoice more over one sinner that did penance than over ninety and nine that needed no penance.

Could there be a condescension of a lower depth than this? It is as if He resolved—I am speaking humanly, for He knew no change, nor were His appointments the expressions of a mutable will, nor His plans the caprice of affection or the taking advantage of an occasion—it is as if He resolved to make by means of His Incarnation another disclosure of the divine perfections more wonderful than the Incarnation itself had been, and that this disclosure was the Blessed Sacrament. It appeared as if He could not part with Bethlehem and Egypt, Nazareth and Jerusalem, Gennesareth and Bethany, Gethsemane and Calvary;

as if He could not forego one mystery of the Three-and-Thirty Years, and therefore by means of His Human Nature, and through His omnipotence, He would combine and renew them all; and this combination and this renewal were the Blessed Sacrament. It is as if He would have all worship and all love and all faith and all religion collected and thrown into one mystery, and that single mystery should be His own pre-eminent Self; and this concentration of Himself, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, Babe and Man, glorious and ignominious, on earth and in heaven, Sacrifice and Sacrament, should be the Adorable Host of the Altars of the Church.

The magnificence of heaven becomes at once, not a home, but an exile. It cannot help Him to this consummate mystery. It gives Him no occasion; it opens to Him no abyss; it cannot tempt Him with the exquisite bait of manifold humiliation. He turns from it with a look as if it had played Him false and disappointed Him. But earth can promise all He asks, and keep its promise with prodigal abundance. Vast and seemingly interminable as were the depths of its misery and nothingness which He had already filled, fresh abysses of unfathomable nothingness yawned before Him, and wooed Him down into themselves, as the depth of Mary's lowliness had wooed Him to earth before. It made earth seem at once a paradise and a home, and He took glad possession, He the Incarnate Word, of its lowest depths, with the sublime abjection of the Blessed Sacrament.

This is a very human way of putting it; and while it is not literally true itself, it places in its only true light the love of Jesus for us in the Blessed Sacrament. Now He is here, all the world over, in tens of thousands of places, beautifying the world in the sight of God, and winning for it countless unthought-of blessings. Not in heaven only.

but now on earth, and multiplied a million times, He worships the Holy Trinity for us, and a million times worships worthily. His vicinity is an inexpressible support to us in our exile; and while the awful and mysterious way in which He renews His Sacrifice for us in the Mass is our daily life and our daily salvation, He allows Himself to be kept for our comfort in worshipping Him; and more especially for the sick and dying; and He goes to them, as He will one day come to us, if St. Barbara be true to her clients and lets us not die without viaticum, like a Father to His timid little ones who so dreadfully fear to cross the dark gulf to Him. He comes and carries us over in His arms Himself. But where is the gain of the Blessed Sacrament to Him? If He did not condescend to count our little love His great gain, the gain would all be ours, not His. What a Saviour! What a Sacrament! What a God !

If the Blessed Sacrament is Jesus all for us, is it not the most legitimate of conclusions that we should be all for Him? We should be all for Jesus, if Jesus is our all. But what does this mean? Surely, among other things, that the Blessed Sacrament should be to us just the single overpowering fact of the world. Our hands hold Him; our words make Him; our tongue rests Him; our body compasses Him; our soul feels Him; our flesh feeds upon Him, Him, the Infinite, the Incomprehensible, the Immense, the Eternal. Must not all life be looked at in this light, just as the whole Church lies in this light and has no other? What more attentive, what more reverent, what more familiar, what more timid, what more happy, than the worship of the Blessed Sacrament, and the peculiar practice of the presence of God which it is to all of us! Our whole being from year's end to year's end resolves itself to one double duty, one while praise, and

another while reparation, to this Most Holy Sacrament. What else will the grand ceremony of our entrance into eternity be, but simply the unveiling of the Blessed Sacrament?—"The Blessed Sacrament," 466-469.

XLVII

OUR LADY OF THE EUCHARIST

LET us think for a while of devotion to our Blessed Lady. Who can doubt that there is a close and invariable connection between devotion to our dear Mother and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament? The force of terms would be enough to prove it. The lives of the saints and the teaching of spiritual books are both full of it. But we do not need them for proofs; for the experience of every one of us proves it decisively, to ourselves at least. We have felt and known that in proportion as we loved our Blessed Lady, our devotion to the Blessed Sacrament grew more tender and more reverent, and the more we were with the Blessed Sacrament, even without seeming to think of Mary, the more an intense devotion to her took possession of the very depths of our heart. This is a phenomenon which is universal throughout the life of the Church, and which needs no further commentary than the remembrance that one is the Mother, and One the Son.

What is it that makes the Espousals of our Lady so sweet and so fertile a source of contemplation? That mystery is as it were a woody mountain lighted up with the gold of the yet unrisen sun. It is a manifold prophecy of things to come. It is the preparation of that mysterious shield of secrecy behind which God would place the great mystery of the Incarnation. The double beauty of the Mother and the Maid is shining there beforehand. Moreover, it contains within itself, all the circumstances considered, the exercises of an heroic virtue such as well beseems the Sinless and Elect Daughter of God. Obedience, faith, self-renunciation, humility, and virginity, all these graces were practised there as the world had never seen them before. But this mystery of twofold purity, at once a type of the virginity and yet fecundity of the Blessed Trinity, and of the Union of the Two Natures in the One Person of Our Lord,—what would it be but for the light which the coming mysteries of the Sacred Infancy already cast upon it?

So too the Presentation of our Blessed Lady is a mystery full of beauty, yet a beauty which hardly can be called its own. It is a lovely sight in truth to see; there is the miraculous Maiden of three years old, mounting the temple steps with the gravity and dignity of age, and offering herself to the house of God with the full use of the most comprehensive and majestic intellect which the world had ever known, even at that early age. Yet what is it but one step in an oblation which began in Anna's womb, rose in its heroic degrees of lifelong self-sacrifice, attained its highest height on Calvary, and stayed there on that same mystical Calvary fifteen years after Jesus had come down from it and was gone to His Father's glory? It is as one of the marvellous beginnings of the marvellous Mother, that we gaze with so much devotion on Mary's Presentation.

Let us mount higher still. Earth never broke forth with so gay and glad a fountain as when the Babe Mary, the infant who was the joy of the whole world, the flower of God's visible creation, and the perfection of the invisible and hitherto queenless angels of His court, came like the richest fruit, ready-ripe and golden, of the world's most memorable September. There is hardly a feast in the

year so gay and bright as this of her Nativity, right in the heart of the happy harvest, as though she were, as indeed she was, earth's heavenliest growth, whose cradle was to rock to the measures of the whole world's vintage songs; for she had come who was the true harvest-home of that homeless world. Yet it was the mystery of the maternity which made her Nativity a joy so great. It also must lean forward and catch its light from out the mysteries of the Sacred Infancy.

Higher still now, up to yonder primal fountain, around which at this moment the Church of God is drawing her lines and raising her circumvallations, as it were about the purest fountain of the waters of Sion. Here is the living water of divinest miracle, divinest redemption, divinest grace, divinest love, our Mother's Immaculate Conception. See how the whole Church is gathering round in crowds to gaze into the deep liquid bosom of the waters, and see the wonders of heaven and the operations of God faithfully and awfully imaged there. Countless souls are feeding highest sanctity upon its unworldly freshness. There are the doctors of the Church slaking their thirst for truth at its animating streams; and the blind multitudes drink and look up, and behold! their eyes are opened, and Jesus shows more beautiful and Mary shines more brightly: and the poor and the comfortless and all the careworn, high or low, mitred, crowned, or bare-headed, are there, and they throw the waters up into the air for joy, and as they fall they make countless rainbows all over the horizon of the storm-tost Church. Troops of virgins keep glad watch over its waters day and night with special prayer and song. The Chief Shepherd is there, kneeling on the fountain's marge, and at his sign from all the orders of the Church rises up in stern magnificence the old Veni Creator, the prelude of the most glorious definition of the Catholic faith, one which the torment of cruel heresy has not wrung from the reluctant reverence of the Church, but which is the irresistible and spontaneous outburst of doctrine and devotion, too hot to be longer pent within her mighty heart.

The wisdom of the schools and the instinct of the multitude have vied with each other, and who shall say which was conqueror in this holy strife? Happy they whom God has kept, like Simeon of old, to this glad day, when Peter has bid his shepherds pitch their tents and feed their flocks so high up the holy mountain, and by this well of purest waters! Yet it is the joy of Bethlehem which is beating in them, like a pulse. It is not only or chiefly the sinlessness of God's fair creature, but of God's dear Mother, which we are greeting with such triumphant acclamation. It is at the well-head of the Incarnation that we are worshipping. These waters of gladness, we look to drawing them one day out of another well, when they have changed their colour and had their price put on them; for they are the blessed elements of the Precious Blood.

But let us rest another moment at the Immaculate Conception, and from the height of that early mystery see what a vista is open before us. I said those waters would one day be Precious Blood. I might have said, They will one day be the Body and the Blood of Christ upon the Altars of the Church. I called that mystery the well-head on earth whence first sprung to light the eternal decrees of God's redeeming love. Watch the current of grace, which way it flows. Down from the mountain of the Immaculate Conception for nine long months it wends its way through wonders unimaginable and graces incomparable. Once more it issues to the light when the outward eyes of men could gaze their fill upon the beauty of God's Infant Mother. Past the steps of the temple on the

day of the Presentation, and around the holy couple in the Espousals, and to the house at Nazareth, it has flowed for fifteen years. Let us look at the fountain once more. It is a fount of blood in Mary's Immaculate Heart, and lo! it ebbs away unseen, and look! it is another fount of Blood in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and round it gather all the mysteries of the Sacred Infancy, of the Boyhood in Nazareth, of the Three Years' Ministry, and of the Salutary Passion. What a vista, those Three-and-Thirty Years! Look at the fountain again! It was scattered: it was in the dust of Olivet, on the stones of Sion's streets, on the lashes of the scourge, on the cast-off crown of thorns, on the soaked vestments on Calvary, on Mary's hands and the darkly-stained tree of the Cross; angels have gathered it together, adored it, worshipped it as God, as they were bound to do; and now behold! another fountain! It is in the Sacred Heart of Jesus Risen. He bears it secretly about the earth for forty days. It ascends with Him to heaven. There at this hour it is worshipped in its divine beauty, on a higher mountain far than the Immaculate Conception, at the Right Hand of the Father. It has risen higher than its level. Onward still it majestically lapses through centuries of grace, whose rivers seem to widen and to grow more exuberant in every age; and at last, all round about it, dear reader, stand the graces, the preparations of graces, the fruits of graces, which have to do with you and me, and our turning all to God; and the vista that began with the Immaculate Conception closes with the Blessed Sacrament.

If it be true, as St. Thomas teaches, that all the grace we receive before we are participators in this queen of Sacraments, we receive only in proportion as we implicitly desire to receive the Holy Communion, and if it be true that the Blessed Sacrament is both the augmentation and the perfection of the spiritual life within us, and that the Passion of our Lord is the fountain, origin, and principle of the Blessed Sacrament, then is it true that for each one of us that marvellous avenue of graces, which began in the Immaculate Conception, runs without a fault or break straight to the Blessed Sacrament. The one mystery answers to the other; the one illuminates the other; the one completes and consummates the other. The Blood that is in the Chalice is from the living Heart of Jesus. It was shed in the Passion before it was shed in the Chalice. It had lived long in His Sacred Heart before He shed it; and He took it at the first, with His spotless Flesh, from the Immaculate Heart of Mary; and that it was sinless and stainless there was from the Immaculate Conception.

Thus at one end of the avenue is Mary's sinless flesh, prepared for her as for the Mother of God, and at the other end the sinful flesh of man made immortal and incorruptible by the Flesh of Jesus, Mary's Son, and the sinful soul of man washed to a glorious purity in the Blood of Jesus, Mary's Son, through the mystery of His sweet sacrament of love: and the light that lies ahead, the light we are all approaching, and have not yet attained, the glow and splendour of our heavenly home, it is by the same sweet Sacrament that we shall attain it, and make it ours at last. So at every mass and in each communion we look up to the Immaculate Conception. The light of that far-reaching mystery is in our faces on the altar-step. It beams direct upon us, and so full is it of the same light as the Blessed Sacrament, that we seem almost to hear our Mother's voice from that distant fountain, "Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved!" (Cant. v. 1).-"The Blessed Sacrament," 156-162.

XLVIII

THE INCARNATION AND THE MASS

One moment, and the Virgin Blood of Mary was all her own. The immaculate maiden had not been clothed with the solitary prerogative of Virgin Maternity. Another moment, and the Sacred Body had been instantaneously fashioned from her purest blood by the Holy Ghost Himself, perfect in every limb, symmetrical in every proportion, exquisitely formed for the keenest and most overwhelming suffering, and in all respects beautiful exceedingly. One moment, and the great empire of nothingness lay before the silent power of God, and no word was spoken over its dim and vast abysses. Far and wide lay the dark illimitable regions of possible creatures, but there was no stir in their stagnant and obscure depths. Another moment, and more resplendent than the light of heaven, more beautiful than all the spiritual and intellectual beauty of the countless angels, more majestic than the manifold mysterious pomps of all creation beside, sprung forth from nothing the Human Soul of Jesus. One moment, and the Eternal Word was being eternally begotten of the Father, and from Him and from the Father the Holy Spirit was eternally and ineffably proceeding. All created natures were utterly separate and distinct from Him, neither had He assumed any of them to Himself, nor descended to be, so to speak, a part of His own creation. But in one and the same moment, so instantaneously that except in mere imagination no atom of time came between, no swiftest, divinest, and most lightning-like succession, but in one and the same identical moment the Holy Ghost had fashioned that Body from Mary's blood, and the Soul of Jesus had sprung from nothing

and had animated and informed that wonderful Body, and the Body and the Soul found no need of a human subsistence, for in that one same identical moment the Person of the Eternal Word had assumed them to Himself, and He was one Person with two natures, and the blissful Virgin was more incomparably virgin than before, and was a Mother too, the Mother of the Eternal God; and the tingling silentness of the quiet midnight filled the little room at Nazareth that night in March, and the unconscious stars drifted across the sky, and the lily was closed and sleeping in its vase, and the watch-dogs of the herdsmen of Nazareth broke ever and anon the stillness of the night. while the awful mystery was being accomplished. Morning rose on the earth, cold, clear, vernal; and the long-expected Redeemer of mankind had come, and no one but the Mother knew.

Change the scene for a moment to the Catholic altar. It is the mid-silence of the great function. One moment, and there is bread in the priest's hands, and wine, the fruit of the grape, in the chalice on the corporal. One moment, and there is the substance of bread, with its accidents inherent in it, and it would be the grossest of idolatries to offer any manner of worship to that senseless substance. One moment, and the Body of our Lord is at the Right Hand of the Father, receiving in the splendour of its ravishing magnificence the worship of the prostrate hierarchies of heaven. Another moment, and what was bread is God. A word was whispered by a creature, and lo! he has fallen down to worship; for in his hands is his Creator, produced there by his own whispered word. One moment, and at the bidding of a trembling frightened man. omnipotence has run through a course of resplendent miracles, each more marvellous than a world's creation out of nothing, not as swiftly as a well-skilled finger sweeps

down the keys of an instrument, but unspeakably more swiftly; for here there has been no succession: in one and the same identical moment the whole range of these miracles was traversed and fulfilled. There is the selfsame Body which the Holy Ghost fashioned out of Mary's blood. There is the selfsame Soul that sprung in the fulness of its beauty from the sea of nothingness. There is the selfsame Person of the Eternal Word who in Mary's womb assumed that Body and that Soul to Himself. Only, in this is the altar more wonderful than the room at Nazareth, that here many times a day, and on tens of thousands of other altars, from the northern fringes of everlasting snow to where the exuberant foliage of the tropics droops into the warm seas, and simultaneously on thousands of altars at once, this stupendous mystery is accomplished; and through the instrumentality, not of a sinless mother, but of unworthy faulty priests. Moreover a new mode of existence, without local extension, is conferred upon the Body of Christ, in addition to the mode which it already possessed in heaven. All the while, the sun shines in at the church windows, and the tapers burn unconsciously on the altar, and the flowers shed their fragrance from the vases, while the great mystery is being enacted. But though inanimate nature has not wherewith to suspect it, and though the senses are deceived and penetrate not beyond the sacramental veils, the very miracle of whose continued unsupported existence they are unable to report, the mystery is no secret; the bended knee. the bowed head, the beaten breast, the shrouded face, the instantaneous hush, has revealed that there is not a Catholic child in the church who does not know, and love, and fear, and worship with his heart's heart the transcending mystery of love. The marvel of Consecration contains within itself the precious wonder of the Annunciation, and more besides. -" The Blessed Sacrament," 140-143.

XLIX

THE VISITS OF THE HIDDEN GOD

It were long to tell how many and how attractive were the virtues which the new Mother exercised in this mystery. How spiritual joy lent wings to her feet, and how she overcame her love of seclusion and flew from her nest over the hill-country of Juda, full of charity, to communicate to St. Elizabeth, not the secret, for she knew the Holy Ghost Himself would communicate that to her cousin, but the joy of Messiah's coming; how Elizabeth hailed her as the true Mother of God, and how Mary's immaculate heart overflowed in glorious and prophetic song; and how the angels went with her on her way, attending the living Ark of the Covenant, and worshipping the world's Ruler who was hidden in the sanctuary of His chosen temple-all these it is not the season to expound. What we have particularly to do with, are the dispositions of Jesus Himself, and the wonders which He wrought.

Truly He is in haste to be about His Father's business. Truly He is an impatient conqueror, to be thus early beginning His conquests, and laying the foundations of His world-wide empire. He cannot bear to be in the world for ever so short a while, but sin shall feel the weight of His unborn arm. There was none to cast out of Mary. He had seen to that Himself long before. There was not even so much as the shadow of a sin which He could drown in the effulgence of His light. His first mission and ministry was in the womb, and the babe unborn the first conquest of His divine apostolate. By and by we shall see Him pale and bleeding beneath the moonlit olives on the hill, whose umbrage shrouded the Creator in His astonishing mortal agony, and we shall know with what unutterable intensity

He hated sin. Yet the modest picturesque mystery of the Visitation hides a hatred of sin no less intense, and which almost seems to be more powerful and more divine. The Baptist in his mother's womb has been conceived in guilt, like the rest of Adam's children, Mary alone excepted. He is bound with the thraldom of the fall, with the chains of original sin. But the living Ark of the Covenant, the tower of David, the ivory tower, the seat of wisdom, and the marvellous vessel of devotion, brings her heavenly Burden nigh to where he is; and the unborn Child destroys the sin and abolishes the curse of the unborn child. The Baptist leaps with exultation in his mother's womb, and worships, with the abounding gladness of his sinless soul, his Redeemer and his God hidden in the Virgin-Mother; for the full use of reason is conferred upon him, and some of the gifts of original justice are restored to him; and he is so hung over with the ornaments of grace, that he shines and burns with a more than human light, and so to overflowing is he filled with heroic sanctity, that of all yet born of women none is so great a saint as that unborn John, the Precursor of our Lord: and Elizabeth wonders at the marvel that has been wrought within her, while the Mother, whom generations bless, is singing the sweet thanksgiving of her humility, which Jesus is making in her heart and she is uttering with her tongue.

What is all sweetness in Communion, all joy at Benediction, all inward fluttering of the ravished heart before the Tabernacle, but the antitype of this delightful mystery of the Visitation? Has it not always been Mary that brought Him to us? Look at our past lives. When did we come to love Jesus so burningly, so enthusiastically, as we do now, when was it, and where, and how, and what reminiscences are mingled with it all? O my Mother! my Mother! I see as it were threads of gold running ever through the web of my past life. They are the threads of

thy love, thou who hast been my providence. They are here and there, no part is without them, no fold but they are shining there. In places the divine pattern is defaced, in others it is obscured, and the golden streaks themselves are tarnished; but still they are there, connecting one part with another, and giving unity to the whole. When I hold the web up to the light of heaven-perhaps I do not see plainly, for I have had to weep so bitterly over that miserable past but it seems as if in that light, from the cradle, heresydarkened, even to the maturity of man's years, the golden threads are always forming themselves into the dear Name of Jesus, and whichever way I look, if I read forward or backward, up or down, and on whichever side I turn the web, still I read Jesus, Jesus, always Jesus, nothing but Jesus. I never have a Communion but to thee I owe it. The tabernacle, the pyx, the monstrance—the very beauty of the mystery is that it is thy Jesus, and not another, the Body that was formed from thee, and not a new one, which consecration brings. When I come to thee on thy feasts, to look at thyself, to admire thy beauty, to praise thy grace, to glorify God for all thy gifts, to kneel before thee and tell thee all my heart in prayer, for thou art omnipotent in thine intercession, thou hast Jesus with thee and makest me feel Him even when haply I was not thinking of Him in my mind, though surely I am always loving Him in my heart.

All our best life, all our spiritual life, is nothing but a succession of Visitations, Visitations from Mary bringing Jesus with her. But nowhere is the similitude so faithful as it is in the Blessed Sacrament. How often, when we come near to the tabernacle, a secret fire comes forth, and our hearts burn within us without apparent cause. Cares fall off, tears are dried, doubts melt away, temptations are paralysed, anxieties are allayed, our soul is bathed in quiet

sudden jubilee. Joy, exultation, praise, delight, the sense of forgiveness, and the spirit of worship, these are exactly the fruits produced within us, as they were produced in the Baptist's soul.

There is no one to whom the mere vicinity of the Blessed Sacrament has not been the cause of unnumbered blessings, even if he knew them not. But there are few who have not felt them, touched, handled, caressed them, almost as if they were sensible things, so vivid and so solid have been the realities of grace. "Our hands have handled the Word of life," says St. John. So is it with us. When love has made us acquainted with the Blessed Sacrament, it seems as if His invisible presence upon earth could hardly have been so real, so plain, so cognizable, so undeniably evident, as His sacramental presence. It becomes hard to believe; not because the mystery is so appalling, its miracles so singular and so multitudinous, its difficulties so obscure and so impenetrable. Oh no! but because, O Lord! faith is of things unseen, and we seem to have seen Thee so clearly that we should know Thee and discern Thee now for evermore; and because faith is of things hoped for, and we have had Thee and handled Thee and tasted Thee and possessed Thee; and what is there left whereby to exercise our faith? Behold! our hearts and our souls leaped within us for joy; and what were we that the Mother of our Lord should come to visit us, and bring her Burden nigh unto us, and that He, the cause and the charity and the speed of her coming, should work these secret miracles upon our hearts, that would be almost innocent if they were unconscious that it was He, but alas! knowing Him, have been cold and wayward, peevish and estranged !-- "The Blessed Sacrament," 144-148,

T

THE EUCHARISTIC BETHLEHEM

What our Blessed Lord allowed to happen to Himself in the days of His childhood, He allows to happen to Himself daily in His sacramental life. The Creator of the world lay as a weak Babe in the manger, and the irrational creatures, the patient ox, the despised ass, stood where the kings of the earth did not deserve to be. They gazed fearlessly with their meek unintelligent eyes on the veiled majesty of the Eternal. They warmed His cold limbs with their neighbourhood and their breath. Just so He lies upon the altar, and the lights twinkle round Him, and the flowers shed their fragrance and wither away before Him, and the curls of sweet smoke from aromatic gums rise up daringly to His throne, and entwine themselves amid the rays of His monstrance, and dim the crystal of His home, and leave their odour upon His veil. All that is little, simple, innocent, is gathered for Him out of His own creation and put to attend on Him, as it was in His Nativity.

In Bethlehem He slept; and Mary and Joseph saw the closed eyes, and heard the regular breathing, and watched all the graceful circumstances of childhood's sleep. Nothing could be more complete than His seeming inobservance. For awhile, it looked as if the cold and the misery of the cave were buried for Him in a happy oblivion, the outer world cut off from Him, the current of bitter thought sundered in twain, and the awful omnipresence, so to call it, of His prescience suspended in an infant's light but refreshing slumber. But no! beneath that breast the heart is awake though the body sleeps. Beneath those restful eyelids the terrific vision of Calvary is strong and clear, and fierce as in the hours of vigilance. Sleep has

touched not the operations of His commanding reason, where ineffable acts of sacrifice, religion, merit and dignity, are being multiplied with every one of the precipitate pulsations of the new-born Babe. Just so in the taber-There He sleeps in the embrace of a mystical He debars Himself from the use of His senses. He sees not with His eyes, He hears not with His ears. He stretches not forth His hands, nor do His lips part to speak, neither does the incense strike upon His sense of smell. But He is there under the species governing the world, dispensing grace, and living a multiform life which it baffles our words to tell and our love to worship worthily. -" The Blessed Sacrament." 174-176.

LI

THE FOSTER-FATHER AND THE EUCHARIST

THE mysteries of St. Joseph rise up like a beautiful cloud of incense from the Sacred Infancy. He belongs wholly to it. We know nothing of him except in relation to it. It seems the one end for which he was created and so wonderfully sanctified, the one work which God gave him to do. He is altogether detached from the Passion. It does not even cast shadows over him beforehand, as it does over the Mother of Sorrows. Nay, even before Jesus has left the Holy House for the toil of His Three Years' Ministry. Joseph has been taken to his rest. Worn out with divine love, he has died in a sweet ecstasy, pillowed on the bosom of Jesus, and with Mary by his side, in the very lap of all that was most beautiful and most holy and most heavenly on earth. No thought of violence mingles with the memory of his peaceful though anxious offices. The Blood of the

Circumcision was his Gethsemane and his Golgotha. His early life is lost in obscurity, and of his boyhood we can form no idea, beyond what is supplied by a vision of Sister Emmerich. But who can doubt that all was a preparation for the great office to which God appointed him? Who can doubt that all was forming and consecrating him as the foster-father of the Word made flesh?

Belonging, as he does, exclusively to the Sacred Infancy, we shall not be surprised to find that the spirit of devotion to him is the spirit of devotion to the Sacred Infancy, and that with two additions of the most touching sort. First of all, he seems to represent ourselves in the Cave of Bethlehem, the Sojourn in Egypt, and the House at Nazareth. All the intimacy and familiarity to which the Infant Saviour vouchsafes to give us right and title by His Incarnation, all the minute ministries of tenderness and devotion which He condescends to receive from us, all the daring joy which His infantine infirmities cause in our hearts, and all the trembling adoration which the nearness of His hidden Divinity demands from us,—all these things Joseph is there to receive and to pay, to feel and to show, as it were in our behalf. He is there as the representative of all the future generations of the faithful, especially of those whose hearts are drawn by a singular attraction to these first mysteries of Jesus.

But, secondly, St. Joseph is in Bethlehem, Egypt, the Wilderness, and Nazareth, as the shadow of the Eternal Father. This is the immensity of his dignity. The incommunicable and ever-Blessed Paternity of the Father is in figure communicated to him. He is the foster-father of Jesus. To the world without he passes for His father. He exercises the authority of a father over Him, and performs for Him the affectionate and anxious offices of a father. Nay, in His Human Nature our Lord is subordinate to Joseph, whereas in His Divine Nature He never could be subordinate to the Eternal Father. The unspeakable treasures of God, Jesus and Mary, are committed to St. Joseph's keeping; and he is himself a treasure, as well as the treasure-house of God. He is part of the scheme of redemption. Like Jesus and Mary, he has his types and forerunners and prophecies in the ancient Covenant. He assists God in keeping the mystery of the Incarnation secret; and, as the representative of the Eternal Father, he is to us in his attendance upon the Holy Child a perpetual memorial of His Divinity. By his very office, by that in heaven which he adumbrates, he reminds us at every turn that the Babe is Very God of Very God. Thus, while he teaches us the greatest familiarity, he also teaches us the greatest distance. While he encourages us to come near and kiss, he bids us also fall down upon our knees and adore profoundly the hidden majesty of the new-born Eternal. Thus heaven and earth met in him at Bethlehem, in his double office of representative of the Eternal Father and representative of faithful Christians. . . .

But look at the parallel between St. Joseph and the Catholic priesthood. Was he the steward of God's house? so are they. Was he the dispenser of God's gifts, as the Church calls him? so are they. Was he the keeper of the Bread of life? so are they. Did he handle, carry, lift up, and lay down the Body of Jesus? so do they. If Jesus was subject to him, so is He, and even more wonderfully, to them. If he kissed Jesus, they may not be so bold, but they kiss the paten where He lay yesterday, and is to lie to-day. If he washed and clothed Jesus, they in this must stand a little further off, and wash the sacred vessels and napkins, and clothe His pyx, and veil His tabernacle, and adorn His flower-girt throne. What are exposition, procession, benediction, communion, locking and unlocking

the tabernacle, carrying the Blessed Sacrament to the sick, but so much imitation of what Joseph did to the Child Jesus? Only that, what was his solitary prerogative now belongs to multitudes of priests, and that the mystery of consecration is a kingdom of wonders beyond our sight into which the shadow of Joseph cannot reach, but where Mary, and the Holy Ghost, and the great primeval work of Creation alone come with their similitudes.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 167-169, 173.

LH

ST. JOSEPH, PATRON OF PRIESTS

MARY is without her Child, and we think of Calvary, the Garden-tomb, and the House of John. Joseph is bearing the Babe, and has now grown so vivid a shadow of the Eternal Father that he almost startles us into worship. The immense Word filled the whole Bosom of the Eternal Father. He nestles well now in one corner of Joseph's bosom. Behind him, visible only in uncertain aerial outlines, follows a procession, a pageant of grand and gorgeous apparitions, at which we gaze in breathless awe. It is the historical priesthood of the whole long-enduring Church, up to the last ordination before the day of doom and the young priest who will have but one mass to say. Popes are there, with their meek faces overshadowed by their tiaras; bishops whose countenances beam with masculine holiness, looks of paternal softness unbending the austere lines of science on their brows: priests also, men of manifold gifts, fountains of sacred light, sparkling with the strange inventions of self-crucifying charity, hearts large as oceans, men that knew how to multiply their lives a hundred times for souls, the diversity of whose eloquent lineaments, silently speaking

as many tongues of love as there are languages on earth, is controlled into unity by one pervading, sovereign air of tenderness, as if they were the sisters of souls rather than their rulers

All these with countless pure-faced Levites, and youthful ministers beautiful in boyish chastity, mingling the impulses of a free graceful artlessness with the self-controlling happiness of a downcast bashful mien, -all these are shadowily following Joseph, as if they were his one shadow variously multiplied, while he bears the Infant in his arms. follow, not in the sinuous bends of a festal pageant, but like a broad serried band of Roman soldiers marching on the straightest road. The Face of Jesus looks the meaning of it all, but is as silent in its swaddling-clothes as the Blessed Sacrament is upon the corporal.—" Bethlehem," 347, 348.

LIII

THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD

THE priesthood was created for the Holy Eucharist. Our whole life as priests resolves itself into duties and ceremonies with regard to it. To that end we are deputed. We are taken out of the world and set apart. The mark of Jesus Christ is put upon us, and the spirit of the world and the ways of the world and the allowable things even of the world are to us what they are not to others. We have to enter the Holy of Holies daily in one way or another. We have to handle God, and to be ready at all moments to wait upon and carry about and administer the infinite substantial purity of the Most High.

An invisible character has been sculptured upon our soul by the chisel of the Holy Ghost, that we may be the property of the Blessed Sacrament for ever. Our hands

have been anointed to touch Jesus. Even He Himself in the holy oil of Extreme Unction shrinks from the spot where that other greater unction went before. There is not a nun on the Quirinal who is so much or so truly a Sacramentine as we priests are, all of us. None of the mystical wonders of the saints are to be compared to ours. They attract Him from the tabernacle; we from heaven. He raises Himself from the corporal and lays Himself upon their tongues: we lift Him up, and break Him into three pieces, and He remains unbroken, and He loves us for what we dare to do. We bid Him go to the garrets of dying sinners, and He obeys. We lay Him on the tongues of dreadful, polluted, but secret sinners, and He makes no signof His repugnance. What are the marvels of the saints to these? The fraction of the Host is more than all of them collectively; and then there is still left the wonder of wonders, the Consecration.

Oh! what are we, and what should we be? Mary drew the Eternal Word down from heaven once, while we draw Him daily. She bore Him in her arms till He grew beyond it; but with us His Sacred Infancy is prolonged throughout our lives. Can we look into our Mother's face and tell her we are in this way greater than she, and then not think of the holiness our dread office requires? To Jesus Himself we are Mary, and Joseph, and the apostles, and the evangelists, and, if His dear Sacrament require it, the company of martyrs also; while to the people we are as Jesus Himself. With us priests, self-preservation is but the second law of our nature; the preservation of the Blessed Sacrament is our first. How happy would the slow martyrdom of our unworldly lives be, did we but strive after sacerdotal holiness. If we attract the Blessed Sacrament even so far off as the throne of God in heaven. ought we not to feel His corresponding attraction in our

hearts? The attraction of the Holy Eucharist is our vocation, our ecclesiastical spirit, our sanctity, our joy. The fires of hell cannot burn the character out of our souls. The splendours of heaven will but light it up with more excessive beauty. Mary, there is our first devotion; Joseph is our second; our fathers, the apostles, are our third; and who can discern, for the blood of self-sacrifice makes them both alike, between the spirit of the martyrs and the spirit of ecclesiastics?

In what a close union with Mary ought we not to live, to lean upon her power, to imbibe her dispositions, to learn how to minister to Jesus, to handle Him gently, and to worship Him with whole and undivided hearts. St. Ignatius says he saw nothing but Mary all through the canon: how shall we say Mass without her? When we bear the Blessed Sacrament about from the tabernacle to His throne, from the altar to the altar-rail, from the church to the sick, and above all in that overwhelming privilege, a procession, shall we not reel and totter, if Joseph be not at our side the while? Mary has abandoned her Babe to us, with a reality of which the favours of St. Cajetan and others, into whose arms she gave Him, were but merest figures; for it was not Himself they held, as He really is. That is the solitary grandeur of the Blessed Sacrament. When St. Angela of Foligno assisted at the Mass of an unworthy priest, at the fraction of the Host she heard a low voice of murmuring piercing sweetness thus complain, "Alas! how they break Me and make the Blood flow from My limbs!" Ah! my Fathers and Masters, my Brothers in this intolerable grace! do we not each of us know in his own secret soul at least one priest who, if he had his due, could never break the Host, without having his own heart broken also by the lamentable sweetness of that plaintive cry?—"The Blessed Sacrament," 499-502.

LIV

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

THE cold starlight is over the great desert, and the chill breeze of morning is circulating freshly over its vast fields of dew-damped sand. God is a little spot, a speck in the horizon of His own wilderness. He has come whom the world has unutterably yearned for these thousands of years, and now, though His beautiful presence has been but a few weeks among them. He has to fly like a fugitive from His own creatures. Borne in St. Joseph's arms, He leaves the land where for centuries He has been doing wonders of grace and mercy, and He seeks to hide Himself in the darkest recesses of idolatrous Egypt. To the world's eye St. Joseph is in an attitude of guilt and shame. He is flying before the powers of the world, to save the Child whom a king's ordinance has doomed. Mary's heart is full to overflowing. She knows, as never apostle knew, as never doctor of the Church has known yet, the excessive beauty of her Child; and now the world, instead of drawing towards Him, throws Him off from its skirt as a troublesome and undesirable thing. For Himself, He rests passively in St. Joseph's arms. He lets the cold wind of the desert meet Him in the face, till His tender limbs tremble in the cold. The vivid glaring sun rains out its intolerable light upon the sparkling sands, and the Babe is painfully dazzled by the burning reflection. The bubbling of the infrequent fountain is pleasant to His ear with a human pleasantness; and the cool shade of the palm is grateful to its own omnipotent Creator. What a mystery is all this! Vary all the conceivable circumstances of that flight, and what volumes upon volumes of devotional theology they will give out! All that art has imagined or that poetry has sung, all that the

world knows of epic grandeur or lyric pathos, what is it to the beautiful and the sublime of our Saviour's Infant Flight?

But look at that wild and lawless modern town. people are up in arms. The frightful spirit of sedition has gathered together its reckless masses, who have lost their individual consciences for the moment in the excitement of multitude. They have gathered round a Catholic chapel. Their gestures are those of madmen, their cries the yells of angry savages. There is not a trace of education left in them, not a vestige of moral restraint, not a gesture of gentle feeling. The very traces of civilization are obliterated, as by a deluge, from that barbarian horde. The dark spirit, who is God's enemy, has swept into their minds; he has possessed their souls; he boils in their blood; he thinks in their brain. They throw themselves with axe and fire upon the sanctuary of God: they are burning to massacre the Innocent who lies upon its altar. Wending through the crowd, fearful and in disguise, though with intrepid soul, is the priest of God. He makes no effort to stay the frenzied populace. Not a word to dissuade them from their black design. His end is to escape notice, to seem, now as if he were one of them, and now as if a passenger importunately hindered as he goes along the street. He is flying with Jesus. For himself, he would willingly court martyrdom. But he bears his Lord. Jesus is among those blinded wild beasts. They brush against Him, press rudely upon Him, thrust His little silver home against the bosom of His priest, who is flying with Him from the sacrilege. It is now, in the streets of that city of the Western Republic, whose name it would be ungenerous to record, as it was when the people of Capharnaum would fain have taken our Lord and cast Him headlong from the rock on which their city was built; He passed through the midst of them and they saw Him not.

Or, once more, look in the streets of London. The streams of public vehicles are meeting and passing, the equipages of the rich and noble dashing by, the pavements crowded to rudeness and discomfort, and a thousand signs of a powerful and corrupt civilization glittering in the windows. A priest is threading his difficult way amid it all, with his eyes cast down, and a look of bashfulness about him which they who notice him account a consciousness of guilt. His Roman collar betrays him, and to many, as he passes along, he is a source of bitter thought and of unkindly suspicion. Many a curse is laid on him that he knows not of, and God is commuting them into blessings. Here and there some of the poor Irish salute him and do him reverence. He returns not the salute: he answers not so much as a Benedicite; and they, alone of all that crowd, they know thereby, that he is flying with our Lord to the sick and dying, like Joseph through the streets of Heliopolis; and they stop and turn and look back till he is out of sight, and they think a thought and breathe a prayer, which are more to God than the wealth and art and politics and all the changes of ministry in that royal Babylon. They, the Irish outcasts of haughty Protestantism, the ragged pariahs of proud and heartless London, they alone have eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to love and minds to understand and illuminated souls to worship and adore. Where is the antitype of these pictures but in the Infant Flight ?—" Bethlehem," 176-178.

LV

THE HOUSE OF GOD

What a mystery is that fresh hiding of Himself in the Holy House of Nazareth! The Redeemer of the world is seem-

ingly inactive, as if He were capable of some uncertainty of purpose, or as if the prospect made Him draw back and delay, or as if He were so delighted with the dear human nature which He had condescended to assume, that He could not tear Himself away from the consecrated walls which had witnessed the stupendous mystery, or as if Mary by herself were the world He had come to teach and to redeem. Theology and devotion can people that obscurity with wonders. But we must not delay upon them now. Look at Him simply so far as He was known and unknown in that quiet town of Nazareth. Mary knew Him, as none have known Him since. Joseph knew Him, and adored Him, even while by the ordinance of God his humility was mastering itself to command Him. St. Elizabeth when she came there knew Him. The young Evangelist St. John, and others perhaps with him, were attracted to Jesus they knew not why. They felt pure and holy and good while they were with Him. His lips dropped wisdom and love. His tears were music. His manners were like some wonder of heaven, tranquillizing, awe-inspiring, attractive. The atmosphere around Him was charmed. It was in itself a preparation for Messiah.

There were outer circles also where He was looked at, as he followed Joseph to his shop or Mary to the well. These thought Him strange. The sight of Him cast their minds back perforce on old Hebrew glories, and people quoted Scripture about Him almost unconsciously. Everything He did, or most things, were prognostics. If they lived, they should expect to hear of Him in times to come. Others saw Him, and to them He was all very well; but what was there extraordinary? It was good not to exaggerate about Him. He was too quiet, shy, reserved, silent as a child, to make a hero when a man. It was enough for Mary that she was the mother of an inoffensive son,

who would never bring trouble to her heart nor shame to her home. Others again were piqued at what they deemed the indiscreet notice taken of Him. They were of such tempers as to be vexed because He was admired, and to depreciate Him because He was praised. They were of that overwhelming numerous class to whom the excellence of others is really a mental and physical discomfort. Upon the whole it was with the Child then, as it was with the Man afterwards; the Prophet had not honour in His own country.

Now change Nazareth into the world, the Holy House into a Catholic church, His room into the Tabernacle, the Child into the Host; there is the same hiddenness, the same secrecy, the same intimate sweetness, the same exterior reception varying from faithful praise to kindly doubt, from contemptuous neglect to angry unbelief. Both as far as He is known and as far as He is unknown, how faithfu the copy, how wonderful the parallel!—"The Blessed Sacrament," 178-180.

LVI

THE HIDDEN LIFE

LET us venture for a while to look at the King of saints, as if He were a saint Himself. He will indulge us in all liberties which we take in order to love Him more. He had an extraordinary love of silence. His words, as tradition tells us, were few and rare. He was collected in His Blessed Vision of God. He passed amid earthly things, as if He floated over their surface rather than mingled in their crowds, or vouchsafed to sympathize with their interests. All detached men are silent men. Thus, we are told that a more than monastic silence reigned in the holy house of

Nazareth, with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph; and indeed the contrary supposition would have in it something unworthy and repulsive. Then, again, with this love of silence was the congenial love of hiddenness, which we have already seen to be a mysterious characteristic of God Himself. He was hidden everywhere; hidden when He was in secret, and almost more wonderfully hidden when in public, with the gaze and criticism of men full upon Him. But His silence was not taciturnity, nor His hiddenness sullen or unaffectionate.

Hence there was about Him a sweetness such as no saint ever had before or since. Nothing tried Him. He was never surprised. Rudeness did not unsettle Him. Injustice kindled no human heat in His heart. Importunity never wearied Him. Unseasonableness never provoked Him. In look and word, in gesture, smile, and tear, He was above all the saintly sweetness which our rough natures can conceive. Out of this came His patience, which was absolutely godlike. What is the life of Job to the mysteries of Holy Week? Indeed, patience, whether in his Mother's Bosom, or in the eighteen years, or in the crowded endurances of His last triduo, seems to have been the way by which He accomplished all His great things. His delay of four thousand years before He came, was but a type and prophecy of all that was hereafter.

But what shall we say of His humility? The Eternal Word was so enamoured of that virtue, that it was the low-liness of Mary which merited to hasten the time of the Incarnation and drew Him down from heaven. With what surpassing beauty of humility would He not then adorn His own Sacred Humanity? But, as His humility was just the virtue which He would have us to imitate in Him, so was it the virtue which shed over Him. His preternatural attractiveness. No matter how austerely pure

His doctrine, or how lofty the holiness that He required, sinners were attracted to Him in spite of themselves, and the chains of sin and the world fell off from their souls in the light of His sad yet unrebuking eve. Never was attractiveness like His. It was inexplicable, as the charm of beauty is, or the magnetism of personal influence. Perhaps the secret of it was, not only in the mysterious atmosphere of the Hypostatic Union, but in the heroism of His unselfishness. The apostle sums up the whole of His life in that one emphatic phrase, "He pleased not Himself"; just as the whole perhaps of our half-century of life would be faithfully abridged in the saving, For all these years we have done our best to please ourselves. Such were the seven elements of our Lord's human character. He might have been gay, cheerful, quick, fluent, active, playful, commanding, and foremost; and thus have been by His pre-eminent sanctity the King of saints. But He chose to be silent, hidden, sweet, patient, humble, attractive, and unselfish.

Now by what other words can we characterize the sweet life of the Blessed Sacrament? So near us, so always with us, so full of love towards us, so many widowed, orphaned, tempted, tried, weary, sin-worn, and broken hearts pouring their griefs into His ear, and yet He speaks not; though He knows one word would make a heaven in the most aching heart, and be a spell of peace and power such as the world did not give and cannot take away. He is called down from heaven; and He comes when He is called. But He comes in silence, obeys in silence, is broken in silence, remains in silence, and in silence is consumed. Nay, even in miraculous manifestations, He has spoken many times by pictures, images, and crucifixes; but hardly ever, or very rarely, has the voice been heard from the Host, and when it is, it is not His own voice that we hear. So deeply does

He love His characteristic silence, that we can think of nothing more silent than the Blessed Sacrament.

Neither do we know of anything more hidden. It is the very deepest of His hiding-places. His Divinity was hidden in Judea; His Humanity also is hidden in the tabernacle. The method of His sacramental life itself is hidden, and the doctrine of it hidden, and even the very truth of it hidden from multitudes of men. He was not so hidden at Nazareth, as He is in this secrecy of His predilection. In the days of His Three-and-Thirty years He was sweetness itself to all who came near Him. The darker were the poor penitent's sins, the more sweet was the welcome and the mercy of His Redeemer. Yet, where or when was He so sweet as He is now in His sacrament of love? Sweetness is the very word which theology sets apart to express the effect of that mystery on the soul; and we look for it so naturally in Communion, that we are disappointed when our own unworthiness has hindered its delightful plenitude. If we picture to ourselves our Lord abiding week after week in the dishonourable tabernacle of some lonely unfrequented church, or in the rude hands of an insolent heretical multitude, we shall see that the patience of the garden, the prætorium, and the way of the Cross, has so charmed the Heart of Jesus Glorified, that He has contrived to make it part of this new artifice of love, His sacramental life.

As to His humility, He has united in the Blessed Sacrament all His preceding humiliations, with circumstances of abasement peculiar to itself and in themselves so tremendous, that they have sometimes been a stumbling-block to the proud intellect of man. Yet, notwithstanding all His silence and hiddenness, He is so attractive in the Blessed Sacrament, that it is difficult to account for it upon any natural principles. Nothing draws the faithful to churches, feasts, functions, and services, so surely as this

most venerable Sacrament. He said while He was on earth, referring to His Crucifixion, "When I am lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me." This is especially true of Him now in the Blessed Sacrament, when He is raised on His throne for Exposition or Benediction. Think of Him in His life of glory, worshipped in celestial amazement by the hierarchies of spirits and souls, and then think of Him in the little pyx, why He is there, and how, and under what laws of mysterious abjection, and what must the Blessed Sacrament seem but the very crown of all His inexhaustible unselfishness? In a word, the character of the Blessed Sacrament, as the Blessed Sacrament, is precisely the same with the character of the Teacher of Judea and the Sufferer of Jerusalem—silent, hidden, sweet, patient, humble, attractive, and unselfish.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 453-457.

LVII

THE POVERTY AND OBEDIENCE OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

OUR Lord's state of poverty in the adorable Host equals, if it does not exceed, the poverty of Bethlehem, of Egypt, and of Nazareth. He is shorn of everything, so shorn that it is a great act of faith to believe that He is there at all, or can submit to what the Catholic doctrine involves respecting His sacramental life. If the world was scandalized at the littleness of the Incomprehensible and Immense within the dimensions of an Infant, what will it be at His littleness in the Host, where He exists without any dimensions at all? When He clothed His radiant and flashing majesty with the flesh and blood of a puny Child, and hid in tiny, perplexed, and entangled fingers the incorporeal Right Hand that

wields the thunder, and swings huge solar systems up in the loose void of homeless space, it was a meanness of disguise which struck Isaias with holy stupor, when he beheld the Word of God, long as eternity, broad as perfection, deep as omnipotence, thus "abbreviated" in a Virgin's Bosom and on a Mother's lap. How much more incomparably mean this new disguise of Bread and Wine!

If the obedience of the Omnipotent and His subjection to Joseph were mysteries which marvellously rebuke our human pride and the conceit of our free will, is not His state in the Blessed Sacrament eminently and above all other things a state of obedience, obedience to His own words, to His priests, nay, to the very accidents of the substance whose place He has taken, the subjection, may I dare to say it? of His Soul to His Body, of His divine to His human nature, by the force of consecration? As to the state of helplessness, who would venture to compare even the helplessness of the Infant with the helplessness of the Host? As His state of dereliction at His Nativity was such that He had only Mary and Joseph by His Manger, as afterwards Mary and John by His Cross, so here how often has He but the priest and his server in attendance on Him? If, by His own will, He was deserted by His angels on the Cross, yet as His dereliction in His Infancy included not the heavenly host, who sang aloud in the sky, proclaiming His Nativity, so neither does His dereliction in the Blessed Sacrament extend to the holy angels who are around Him ever in thickly-wreathed choirs of spiritual beauty, with the souls of saints who in lifetime have loved with a peculiar love to haunt the tabernacle. So that here we have a parallel with the Infancy, in a matter where the Infancy is distinguished from the Passion, where He Himself held back the eager legions of angels, and suffered but one solitary, and Oh! how deeply favoured, spirit to console Him

in the garden, as if to show it was His will, not their coldness, which made them mute, inactive, and invisible in the noon-tide darkness upon Calvary.

Now, at the risk of repetition, let me ask you to look back upon these Devotions, Mysteries, and States of the Sacred Infancy: and when you see how like they are to the Devotions, Mysteries, and States of the Blessed Sacrament, omit not to notice how in each one of them the Blessed Sacrament first comes up to the Sacred Infancy, and then goes beyond it. If He dwelt in one Womb, He has dwelt in millions of Tabernacles; and if He dwelt there for nine months, He has dwelt here for ages. If He was hidden in one Holy House, He hides now in countless Churches. If He had two seats whereon He vouchsafed to rest, Joseph's arm and Mary's knee, He rests now in the hands of numberless priests and on the tongues of daily multitudes. If Mary showed Him to the shepherds and the kings, His priests show Him often, to mingled crowds of bad and good. If He was incarnate once, He has been consecrated in the mystery of Transubstantiation numberless and simultaneous times. If He once caused the Baptist to exult by His imparted sweetness, He has done so to millions at Benediction and in Communion, and to the same souls over and over again. If He was once in a manger and between animals, hiddenly, He has been openly upon a thousand altars amid His creatures. If He slept so many given hours in the Sacred Infancy, what are they to the hours He has slept His mystic sleep in the pyx? He fled once into Egypt with Joseph; He has fled with His priests from sacrilege or to the sick times out of number. If His poverty in the Blessed Sacrament does not exceed, as it does, in actual destitution His poverty at Bethlehem, it has this pre-eminence that, whereas Bethlehem was His first choice of poverty, now He has been enriched with the glory of His

Resurrection, Ascension, and Session, and yet, so enamoured is He of that state, that He goes out of His way to make choice of it a second time in the Blessed Sacrament. If He was little as an Infant, at least He had the commensurable dimensions of an Infant; in the Host He has no dimensions at all; He neither measures, extends, nor weighs. His meanness of disguise we have already seen to be more complete in the Blessed Sacrament, and His abandonment more utter. If He was obedient to one Joseph, He is here obedient to thousands of priests, and comes from heaven at their bidding, and runs swiftly, nay, in one indivisible moment, through a scale of unequalled miracles, at Five Words from them. Nay, in His helplessness as an Infant, the very sign of it, the infant's cry, was a power which the Blessed Sacrament has not. There He has abjured even the power of complaining.-"The Blessed Sacrament," 180-183.

LVIII

THE HUMILITY OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Nowhere are we led so far into the deep things of God as by this exquisite mystery. We seem to leave the world and the world's ways behind altogether; nay, even to go out of sight of those ordinary operations of God which are familiar to us and form our common practice of His everblessed Presence. We sink down with Jesus through abyss after abyss, knowing not where He will stop, nor where the infinite abasement of His love will be exhausted. We learn there new wisdom, new devotion, new love. Yet the very light in which we see all these things is changed, because of the very depth to which we have descended. As in the Azure Grotto of Capri, where the light changes its colour

and comes to us bluer than the clear sky above or the beautiful waters below, so when we sink down into the depths of this mystery, though the same lights of faith and reason illuminate us there, it is as though their nature were changed, and they formed a new kind of medium through whose softness we could better see the glory of the divine operations. Then, what devotion this opens out to us! As we gaze upon our dearest Lord sinking from one depth to another, as if He were searching through creation for the deepest depth which He could find, our hearts for very love are constrained to imitate Him in our own feeble way, and to worship Him in His sacramental presence by a continual exercise of interior humility.

Nothing teaches us humility so much as the Blessed Sacrament. Nothing makes us long so intensely to possess this grace. Nothing gives us such a sensible sweetness or such a delightful power in the exercise of it. Our vileness and our nothingness, like a many-chambered subterranean prison, stretch out before us, cell after cell, as if they were endless, and each succeeding one darker and gloomier than the one that went before. God is in each of them, waiting for us with abundant and peculiar graces, whenever we shall come there for them; and the deeper the depth the more intimate is His presence and the richer are His gifts. There, in these depths, it is that we draw the strength of our spiritual life. There is the grace found which makes us willingly and gaily choose shame rather than honour, and revel in humiliation as the children of the world revel in glory, wealth, and pleasure. There it is that self-love has lost its atmosphere, and can breathe no more: Blessed death; more blessed than words can tell; for the liberty it brings s joyous as the bondage before was unendurable!

There also is the grace to throw ourselves beneath the feet of every other creature of God, as something which

our intellect as well as our heart tells us is more vile and nothing-worth than aught else which God has made. There is the grace which makes us see our best qualities to be pusillanimous imperfections, and which hides from us all the grace and beauty of our souls; and there the grace to cause us to feel the greater shame, the greater sense of vileness, the greater wonder at our own utter nothingness, the more God hangs His gifts about us and sheds the exuberant splendours of His love around us: so that the holier we grow, the viler we seem unto ourselves, and when saints, then intolerably vile. Blessed they who are frequent in this exercise! Blessed they who thus love to darken the world to themselves, and go underground and become conversant with these deep places, which are at once the caverns of our own nothingness, and yet the treasure-chambers of God! When they have lost their footing, and are sinking out of depth, and find no bottom, if they begin to fear as Peter did upon the surface of the sea, they look to Jesus; they see Him in His chosen mystery of the Blessed Sacrament sinking far lower, far nearer to annihilation than they can ever reach, and they take heart, and bravely and lovingly imitate Him in these His ineffable condescensions. This exercise of interior humility is at once the most natural and the most fruitful devotion which accompanies the worship of the Blessed Sacrament,-" The Blessed Sacrament," 80-82.

LIX

THE SILENCE OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

THE silence of the Blessed Sacrament seems ever to be saying, Jesus has nothing to think of but you! And the angels say, O happy you! And heaven envies us and earth

rejoices to bear the race of the sons of men. But, our own soul! Perverse thing! how little it knows its own happiness! Could any misery be conceived more dreadful than that God should cease to think of us for one moment? We should drop back into nothingness. Or that He should cease to love us? It would be hell. Yet look at Him in this mystery. He puts forth all His omnipotence to hinder our forgetting Him. He exhausts His infinite wisdom to prevent our hearts growing cold towards Him. He comes into our streets, lies upon our altars, causes bells to ring and thuribles to smoke, so that at every turn we should come across Him. Yet, we who are good, as we call it, who believe, who love, who aim at high things, who wish one day to sit among the seraphim—how little do we think of Him, how much less do we speak of Him, though we speak so much, how almost less than nothing do we do for Him! Ah Lord! Blessed Sacrament! one thing Thou hast left undone. Thou hast let our frost be stronger than Thy fire; and if it had not been so, there need have been no heaven, for earth would have been already more than heaven; for we should have had all Thy glory, and with Thy glory Thy sweet humiliations too .- "The Blessed Sacrament," 471-472.

LX

SACRILEGE

WE have spoken already of mothers watching the deathbeds of their sons. It is the form of human woe which comes most naturally to us, when we are with Mary upon Calvary. When the long struggle is at last over, and the breaking heart has acknowledged at least a kind of relief in the fact that the object of her love has no more to suffer, when that same heart has taken quiet possession of the beautiful dead form before it, as if it were a sanctuary, almost a refuge from grief itself, would not the least roughness, the least inconsiderateness, the most trivial dishonour to the dead body, be a new and fearful sorrow to the mother? Is there a mother on earth who could bear to see with her own eyes even the kindly hand of science, which she has herself invoked, endeavouring to discover in what recess it was that the mysterious ailment lodged itself, which has now made her childless? Would it not be as if she saw a hallowed object desecrated before her eyes? In the dire necessities of the pestilence, with its swift burial and rough ministers and horrible dead-cart and quicklime pit, how much more terrible would the outrage be! She still fills the lifeless figure with the life of her own love, and before she has drunk her fill of love by gazing on it, before the red blood has had time to curdle or the limbs to grow cold, it is torn from her, as if it was not hers, by some stern officers, not the tenderest of their kind, for their office is the rudest, rude even in the wise mercy it fulfils, and is flung upon the dead-cart, with a heap of other pest-stricken victims, and so borne onward to a dishonourable grave, a promiscuous charnel-house. And fresh grief is so tender, so raw, can so little bear handling! Is it not fearful to think of? Yet it is as nothing to our Lady's agony, when the Body of Jesus was outraged by the spear. It is an immeasurably less sorrow in itself, and falls upon a heart which, however sweet and meek and loving, is immeasurably less capable of suffering than Mary's was. But it is an approach to Mary's sorrow, and a shadow of it.

Let us rise higher still. A saint is at the altar, overwhelmed with the dread action which he is performing. His heart is fit to break for love of God, of that incarnate God who lies before him on the corporal. Wild and sinful

men break in upon him, whether in popular tumult or from other cause. He is driven off in his sacred vestments with violence, while he is clinging to the altar as an animal clings to its young when they are being torn from it. He sees the Blessed Sacrament flung upon the ground, the Precious Blood streaming over the altar-steps, and both the Body and the Blood trodden with scorn and blasphemy beneath the feet of the ruffian invaders. Because He is a saint, the sight would kill him, did not God miraculously support him. But the accumulated sorrows of a long life are nothing to this. The vision of that hour has been burned in upon his soul as by a fiery brand. Nothing of it will ever be forgotten. No excesses of penance will be sufficient to satisfy his yearning appetite for reparation. Years after he will shudder in his prayer, and the tears course swiftly down his cheeks, as he calls to mind the boundless horror of that appalling sin. It is a sort of grief beyond common griefs, a grief in a shrine, of which holy and chosen souls only may participate.—"The Foot of the Cross," 302-304.

LXI

THE PRIEST'S MATERNAL MINISTRIES

As our Blessed Lord is daily offered in the Mass, and the selfsame sacrifice of Calvary continued and renewed without intermission day and night around the world, so are Mary's ministries to His mute yet adorable Body going on unceasingly upon thousands of Christian altars and by the hands of thousands of Christian priests. Yet, as is ever the case with those things which we have from Jesus and Mary, what was intense bitterness to her, to us is exultation, privilege, and love. When she had gently laid aside the crown and nails, as precious relics, with what profound reverence

did she kneel to receive the Body of her Son! It was not the attitude of a mother towards a son, but rather of the creature towards the Creator. She adored it with divine worship. She held it in her arms until the rest had adored it also. Her rights as a mother were merged in her service as a creature. Yet the Blessed Sacrament is the living Jesus, Soul as well as Body, Godhead as well as Humanity. Worshipful as was His dead Body, because of its unbroken union with the Person of the Eternal Word, the Blessed Sacrament, if it were possible, demands of us a worship more full of dread, more self-abasing, more profound. We have no mother's rights. We are not, like Joseph of Arimathea, doing Jesus a service by ministering to His Body. The obligation is all on our side. He has come down again from heaven to us. We are not gone up to the Cross to take Him down. With what immense reverence then, ought we not to worship this divine Sacrament! Our preparation for Communion should be full of the grand spirit of adoration. Our act of receiving should be a silent act of holy eager fear and breathless worship. In our thanksgiving we ought to be lost in the grandeurs of His condescension, and not too soon begin to ask for graces, until we have prostrated ourselves before that living Incarnate God, who at that moment has so wonderfully enshrined Himself within us. We should behave at Mass as, with all our present faith and knowledge, we should have behaved on Calvary. At Benediction, and when praying before the Tabernacle, the Blessed Sacrament should breed in us continually a spirit of unresting adoration, unresting as that incessant cry which the astonished Scraphim and Cherubim are continually uttering at the sight of the unimaginable holiness of God. . . .

A continual spirit of reparation must preside over all our devotion, a reparation which is the immediate growth of familiarity, or rather which is the loving familiarity itself

with its eye resting on the reverence out of which all our devotion springs. To the devout mind Jesus habitually presents Himself as one who has not got His rights. He is injured and wronged, with every heightening circumstance of pathetic injustice. There is no time when love pours itself out from the deepest and purest fountains of the heart with more self-abandonment, than when the object of our love has been wronged. The very thought is so pitiable that it creates new love, such love as we never felt before, and the spirit of self-sacrifice beats in it like a heart. It is no longer a mere private joy of our own, a luxury of sentiment, a romance of feeling which, while it enveloped the object of our love, reflected also no little radiance back upon ourselves. Self is more at home in love than in any other of the affections. It is a humbling and unpoetical truth, but nevertheless a truth. Now the position of being wronged invests the object of our love with a kind of sanctity. Affection assumes something of the nature of worship, and then self can live there no longer, because worship is the only real incompatibility with self. Hence it is that the love of reparation is a pure and unselfish and disinterested love. But this is not all. Jesus not only habitually presents Himself to us as one who is suffering, because He is defrauded of His rights, but also as one who is in some mysterious way dependent on our compassion to console Him, and upon our reparation to make good His losses. This adds tenfold more tenderness to our love, and self returns again, but only in the shape of sacrifice, of generosity of work, of sorrow, of abandonment. The spirit of reparation is a beautiful spirit, a spirit of human beauty fit to wait on the Humanity of our dearest Lord. It is the true Mary's lap within our souls, in which the Blessed Sacrament should ever lie, the pure white corporal of our most disinterested love!—"The Foot of the Cross," 326, 327, 331, 332.

LXII

REPARATION

Who does not see for how much we children of the Blessed Sacrament have to make reparation; and how fervent as well as abundant must our reparation be! Have we any work in life which presses so much as this? Is there any better use of time, any fitter preparation for eternity? Are we doing anything else? Surely day after day we are rejoicing in the Mass, or setting aside our other occupations to go to Benediction. Day after day we are gathering round the tabernacle, and telling Jesus how we love Him, and how with bleeding hearts we mourn over the daily dishonour of His real presence and residence amongst us. We should feel a day incomplete, even our busiest day, if we had not made some act of tender reparation to our sacramental God. How beautiful must the sight of Catholic believing hearts be to that dear Inmate of the Sanctuary, overflowing with faith and love, like so many Magdalens devouring His Feet with kisses, washing the very dust away with tears, each one of which has a whole heart in it, and wiping them with the hair of our head, as if what our vanity had most prized was only to be reinstated in its honour by some menial use for Him! How the incense of unbroken prayer is ever rising from us to His sacramental throne; and the perpetual flames of ardent reparation light up His altars as on the night of some exulting feast! But is all this true? It seems unavoidable, the contrary is inconceivable: yet is it true ?

No matter whether we look on those who do not love because they do not believe, or on those who because they believe cannot help but love, it is a sad and wintry scene on which we are called to look. If the sins of unbelievers are materially more startling and repulsive, there is a greater formal want of love in the coldness of believers. We wound the Heart of Jesus more keenly and acutely than they who do not believe. We can look on them with the forbearance of pity, as we look on one beside himself. But we, His own familiar friends, how deep are the wounds which we have the power to inflict upon Him! At Mass how weary, distracted, and irreverent we often are, though our faith tells us it is the same thing as if we had stood with our Lady and St. John beneath the Cross on Calvary! At Benediction, how little are we filled with a spirit of interior devotion, and how often are little domestic arrangements allowed to interfere with our going there! Are our communions at all what we could desire in the way of preparation, or of thanksgiving, or of fervour in the receiving? Are our visits to the Blessed Sacrament as numerous as our facilities and our leisure would allow, to say nothing of the necessities of our own soul, and those of others, to drive us there?

Nay, are we not sometimes ashamed of our faith in the Blessed Sacrament, when in the presence of unbelievers and called upon for some outward recognition of our worship? On the whole, do not we ourselves, as much as anyone else, compel Him to lead the life of poverty and abandonment which so touchingly characterizes the Blessed Sacrament? So it is that with those who believe and those who do not believe, our Blessed Lord in His Sacrament is surrounded, not with choirs of angels or rings of various saints, so much as by groups of every variety of evil character, as He vouchsafed to be in His blessed Passion. They who do not believe represent, one class of them the Jews, another Herod, another Pilate, another the Roman soldiers, and so on; while alas! we who believe are either Judas who betrayed Him, or Peter who denied Him, and Peter unfortunately without Peter's tears, or the rest who

ran away and fled, or at best the curious and indevout spectators of the Crucifixion, some indifferent without dislike, and others sentimental without compassion.

What remains then for us but reparation? There is no true child of the Church of whom it must not be true to say that devotion to the Blessed Sacrament is his special devotion. It cannot be otherwise. Without it there are no other devotions; and of its supremacy over all the rest Catholics cannot lawfully have two opinions. For it is the only devotion which is a divine worship at the same time that it is a devotion also. This is its peculiarity and its pre-eminence. But whether we look at it as a devotion or as a worship, in both points of view reparation occupies a most prominent position: and it belongs to all. For all souls who have a right to love are bound to reparation. . . .

How beautiful is reparation, and what a mystery that God allows so high a work to creatures so poor as we! As if we could build up His ruined glory, and raise temples out of ruins, we who are what we know ourselves to be, something so much worse than those who know us best could for a moment suspect! Reparation! the very thing for which He Himself exists in the Blessed Sacrament; for if it had not been necessary He should come in humiliation to redeem us, it had not perhaps been necessary He should have hidden Himself in this lowest depth of secret silent love. What is so full of heart as reparation, or more full of joy even while we mourn? What is redemption but reparation? What else was Mary's compassion? What else was the earthly occupation of the Sacred Heart? Is it not its occupation in heavenly glory, as well as in the mysterious Host, this very hour? O my poor country! how much she needs, and how beautiful she is. How rich in all else. but in God's gifts, in God's graces, how sadly poor! Not because His Hand is less munificent, but because her heart

is closed against Him. O my countrymen! who have seen days almost of persecution, at least of deadness and obscurity, who have seen the dry bones of heresy come to life and give out punctual harvests every year of numerous and manifold conversions, how dear to you and to the strength of that faith which has been in you pure and firm and bright from reason's earliest dawn, how dear to you should this deep and quiet devotion be of reparatory love. You also whom God has called so marvellously and so sweetly into the inheritance of Catholic truth, which was not yours by birth, do you not feel as the people in the Gospel must have felt on whom Jesus had worked a miracle, almost ready out of love to disobey Him, and to proclaim His love even when He bids you nourish your humility in silence ? How dear, how doubly dear, must the task of reparation be to you, who love much because you have been forgiven much, and have a whole life's work for God to do in half a life or less!—" The Blessed Sacrament," 533-535, 537, 538.

LXIII

THE RICHES OF OUR POVERTY

If an earthly father knew that his child was longing to make him a present, but had not the means, with what prompt hand and overflowing heart would he furnish him with the means! Will Jesus do less? That at least is not His way. Look at what He did to His Mother at the Presentation. No creature, nor all creatures put together up to that time, ever loved God as she did at that hour. Never yet had that ever-blessed and most dear Majesty been worshipped with an adequate act of worship. The angels, with all the varied powers and faculties and manifold

affections of their nine choirs, had been casting their gifts before the throne with fiery love and burning songs of praise these thousands of years, and the Divine Complacency had mercifully stooped to feed itself upon them. Mary herself, the lowly and the chaste, was a more sweet act of worship to the Most High; and all the everlasting praise of the heavenly hierarchies would fill up but a little corner in her Immaculate Heart. Yet even she fell short, and how far short! Sweet Mother! she knew this well; none knew it better; and if ever love could have run wild in the blessed and worshipful calmness of her immense virtue, as it did with her children the saints, and their weaker grace, she might have wished to be annihilated, if so only she could have worshipped God with a sufficient love. But Jesus came to the rescue of her love. He put Himself into her arms, and said to her, "Offer Me! I am equal to My Father! I am a gift, not worthy only, but of the selfsame price and value, infinite, unutterable as Himself!" Now for the first time shall the Most Holy Trinity have an act of fitting worship. Every attribute shall be glorified, every perfection crowned with a crown of love and adoration. every mercy be recompensed; every debt and duty of every creature shall be satisfied; nay, the love and worship of all possible creatures shall be by one act outrun and overpassed for ever! Oh joy, exceeding joy, yea to those who love our most dear God, a joy beyond all other joys! Heaven was silent, and the angels with spirits gushing with love looked down adoringly; and on this earth of ours in Sion's temple, Mary took her Babe into her arms, and held Him up, and gave Him with all the might and impetus of self-sacrifice to the Eternal Father. Thus it was that she, the first of all creatures who did so, worshipped God aright, and gave due glory to the Eternal. But now, O mysterious love, whereby our dear Lord will persist in making Himself so common! there is not a moment, day or night, on this round globe of earth, that the same Child, the Living Host, is not being elevated by mortal hands between earth and heaven, here and all round the world!—
"All for Jesus." 130-132.

LXIV

THE SPIRIT OF OBLATION

God magnifies our own poor actions, and gives them an immense value by uniting them to His, and enabling us to do them from supernatural motives, and in union with Him. It is this last method of putting it in our power to love Him more worthily that we are to consider now. We are to meditate on the treasure of our common actions, and on the Catholic devotion of perpetually offering them up to God united with the actions of Jesus. This is the second manner in which God mercifully rescues us from the littleness and worthlessness of our own selves. There is not a single thing we do all the day long, which may not, and that quite easily, be made to advance the glory of God, the interests of Jesus, and the salvation of souls. No matter how completely the world may have set its seal upon it, nor how utterly it seems to be an affair of temporal business, or a trivial concern belonging only to the misery of human life. The heavenly motive enters into it; that moment it is all filled with God, and becomes a jewel of almost infinite price, with which the Divine Majesty condescends to be well pleased. The hours pass, one following the other: each one is filled with actions belonging to our state. We write, or read, or keep accounts, or buy, or sell, or speak, or think, or suffer; and all the while, if we choose

it, we are minting money, heavenly money, which can merit eternal life. There needs but the act or intention of oblation, by which our actions touch those of God made Man, to confer this value upon every single thing we do.

This devotion of saying Mass, as it were, with our actions all day long is peculiarly Catholic. I suppose it strikes converts as much as anything else in the devotional system of the Church; and it is surely another most touching instance of the way in which God contrives everything for love. Pious people sometimes complain of the distractions of worldly occupations; they think it will be the peculiar business of heaven to worship God with an unintermitting worship; in fact, they complain that earth is not heaven. Yet surely, in this respect at least, it need not be so very unlike it. If ours is a service of love, every one of these so-called distractions is in truth a precious oblation. Every action is Host and Incense and Song and Sacrifice all the day long, if we choose that it should be so ourselves. Now, if we have really at heart God's glory, the interests of Jesus, and the saving of souls, if we would fain be occupied in these things at all hours, we must not neglect to profit by this treasure of our common actions.

The spirit of oblation, I have said, is essentially Catholic. It springs from the doctrine of the Mass, which is the centre and fountain of all true devotion. It belongs to a religion of sacrifice, such as the Gospel is in every way. Our dear Lord redeemed us by the oblation and sacrifice of Himself; and hence oblation and sacrifice enter into every minutest detail of our religion. No wonder, then, that they should give a shape and form, a genius and spirit, to Catholic devotion. This is so obvious, it need not be dwelt upon. But what I want you to observe is, that here also is the same contrivance for love, the same sweet paternal spirit, which God vouchsafes to show us every-

where. It would seem as if prayer was a privilege which could not possibly be exceeded even by infinite compassion, and that a creature could look for nothing more than the privilege of making his wants known to his merciful Creator. Yet oblation is something beyond prayer. In prayer we receive from God; in oblation it is He who vouchsafes to receive, and we are allowed to give. To make presents is not only a sign of love, but of some sort of equality; and thus from oblation there springs a more familiar, tender, and affectionate familiarity with God than could arise from petition only. The childlike freedom of the saints comes in great measure from this spirit of oblation.—"All for Jesus." 165-167.

LXV

THE PRODIGALITY OF THE EUCHARIST

What shall we say of that twofold wonder, the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacrament of Communion? There the Precious Blood puts on the vesture of omnipresence, and it becomes it well. Multiplied by how many hundreds of thousands of times is it not dwelling, whole, living, and glorified, in the Hosts reserved within the tabernacles of the world? Into how many thousand human hearts does it not descend daily, whole, living, and glorified, in the glory of the dread reality of Communion? Into how many thousand chalices does it not empty itself from out the Sacred Heart in heaven every day? The very whirling of the earth, as it makes day and night by turning to or from the sun, ministers to the longings of the Precious Blood. It is bewildering to think of the countless graces of expiation which flow daily from the Sacrifice, or the countless graces of union which flow daily from the Sacrament. This is the

great laboratory in which the Precious Blood makes holiness. In the heart of the Andes, vast, interwoven, and mutually enfolding mountains cover themselves with gigantic forests. The condor, as he wheels above, looks down upon an ocean of impenetrable foliage, without a rent, or break, or insight into the green abyss. So does the Precious Blood, in Mass and Communion, mantle the whole Church with tropical exuberances of grace, as they appear, hiding the natural features of the ground with the ample folds of their verdant overgrowth. The tinklings of the Mass-bell, like new creative words, change the whole aspect of the unconscious world. Unknown and unsuspected temporal calamities are daily driven away, like clouds before the wind, by the oblations of the Precious Blood. Nay, through the crust of the earth the superin umbent weight of that Blood presses its way, and reaches to the sinless caves of Purgatory. Consolations of all s'apes and patterns come there, and are the cooling rains of the Precious Blood. Who can class them? They are like the monotonous diversities of crystals, beautiful for their variety, yet beautiful also for their sameness. The angels, who had the Precious Blood in their keeping during the Triduo of the Passion, have also the administration of it in Purgatory, and are well pleased with this labour of congenial love. But the arithmetic of all this prodigality of the Precious Blood, is it not impossible to the imagination, and distracting to the heart? It disquiets our love. Let us leave off the calculation, and contemplate in quietude the ocean of painstaking graces, of vast satisfactions, and of kingly expiations, into which the daily Masses of the Church outpour themselves, lighting the patient darkness underground, flashing up to the skies as so much additional light and song, and beautifying the poor exiled earth in the eye of the all-holy heavens.—"The Precious Blood." 241, 242.

LXVI

THE SACRIFICE AND SACRAMENT

WHAT Catholic is there who does not know how the four great wants, and duties, and worships which the creature owes to the Creator, the petition of His infirmity, the intercession of his brotherly affection, the thanksgiving of his startled speechless gratitude, the intelligent joyous acknowledgment of God's absolute dominion, are supplied to him, with an infinite worthiness equivalent to the worth of the Creator Himself, in the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass? The perpetual Real Presence of Jesus with His faithful. His perseverance in the obscure tabernacle, and His frequent Benedictions, which preside over the evenings of our toilsome days, just as Mass so beautifully fills the morning with its light and love, so that it is Jesus all day long, courting our society, and mingling with us with an intimacy we get to understand less, and to prize more, the longer it is vouchsafed,—surely this is enough to supernaturalize the whole world, to make hard things easy, and dark things bright, and throw an invisible armour round us which will charm our lives against the weapons and the wiles of hell. But what shall we say of Communion? All ideas of familiarity with God, of intimacy with the invisible world, of the spiritual union of heavenly love, fail us here. The creature, trembling, bashful, eager, backward, frightened, delighted, is bidden to kneel down, and feed, not figuratively or by faith, but with an awful bodily reality, upon his Incarnate Creator. And this eating of the Creator by the creature is the highest act of worship which he can perform! We need not stay to follow out the many-fountained grace of a good Communion, nor to see how it branches out into every faculty of the soul, every power of the mind, every affection

of the will, every delicate sensibility of the conscience, carrying with it secret blessings multiform and manifold, and insinuating even into flesh and blood and bone the seeds of a glorious resurrection. And this miraculous feast on our very Creator may be, and He loves it to be, our daily bread! And this to us who, if we rightly appreciate our vileness, should be astonished every morning that our common food and clothing were continued to us still.—
"The Creator and the Creature," 277-279.

LXVII

HOLY COMMUNION

The Blessed Sacrament not only combines the characteristics of our Blessed Lord; it also excellently and preeminently fulfils His various works within us and without us. We have to declare war against the visible world, its pomps, pageants, pleasures, vanities, and its spirit which is the negation of the Gospel; and it is by the Blessed Sacrament that we are victorious in this war. We have to fight against the invisible world of demoniacal power; and it is by the strong Bread of the Eucharist that we are conquerors. We have to do battle with the intense corruption and prolific miseries of self; and it is the same mystery which in that conflict also is our all in all. We have to live a life of supernatural love; and in the Blessed Sacrament is the fountain from which the waters of continual gladness can alone be drawn to feed that love. Our Blessed Lord crowns in us the grace of all His other sacraments by the overwhelming and inclusive grace of this. He has to feed in us the various appetites of the spiritual life; and here is the manna which has all tastes according as the soul may desire. He sows in our bodies the seeds of a glorious resurrection; and His seedtime is communion. Thus it is by the most Holy Eucharist that He co-operates with us, or of His bounty blesses us, in these seven great works, which are set before our souls, and have to be accomplished in the Christian life.

But the grand aim and object of His love of us is our union with Him and His with us: and here is almost the speciality, the distinctive grace of the Blessed Sacrament. There are four sorts of union, in the wide sense of the term. which we possess with Him independently of the Blessed Sacrament. We are united to Him by essence, by presence, and by power, as our omnipresent Creator; and by ordinary grace as our Incarnate Redeemer. But there are five other unions of a closer and more intimate character which are effected by the Blessed Sacrament. There is first of all a closer union between His Divinity and ourselves in the Blessed Sacrament, than the one which exists in virtue of the divine immensity. We receive His Divinity concomitantly with His Flesh and Blood in the Holy Communion; and both our bodies and our souls are filled with inexplicable benedictions because of the mystical contact.

Secondly, we have a personal union with Him, as the Eternal Word, as the Son rather than the Father or the Holy Ghost, by which we receive wonderful graces, and augmentations of grace even when the species are gone: thus Cornelius à Lapide says, As food, when it is digested, still leaves in the body its nutritive virtue, so the species of the Eucharist leave their virtue of nourishment unto eternal life, and they leave it after a certain fashion with the deity of Christ, which remains with grace. Thirdly, there is the sacramental union of His Body, His Flesh, and Blood, with us, which is the direct union effected by the Sacrament in its own right. Fourthly, there is the union

of His Soul with ours, as if It stretched itself over ours, as the prophet stretched himself over the dead child, with marvellous vivifying power. Of this "union of the redoubled Soul of Christ," Schram thus speaks: Another way in which Christ permanently unites Himself with us in the Holy Eucharist, independently of His union with us by His Divinity, and by His Person, is by His most holy Soul; for when the species are corrupted, and so the Body and Blood have passed away, there is retained a certain replication of the Soul of Christ, by which He permanently, and after a most special manner, unites Himself to perfect souls, and in their measure to the rest of the just; His Soul conjoined to the Word being as it were an immediate instrument of a union more intimate than that effected by the Divinity alone: as Cardinal Cienfuegos teaches in his Vita Abscondita, and Cardinal Belluga in his preliminary judgment of that work. Fifthly, there is a personal presence, accompanied with a great augmentation of grace, which is as it were the odour and impression of His Flesh, Blood, and Soul, after the species have departed. . . .

What an abyss it is to look into—the occupations of Jesus in our own selves, so long as the species abide! The Beatific Vision is actually within us, to angels and to saints. The magnificence of His glory is in our flesh and blood and bone and living soul. He is working there as God; He is working there as man; strange works, and like no other works. He, busy, as it were, and engrossed; we are often heedless and distracted. Whether His efficacy be physical, or moral, or both combined, it is equally wonderful, equally gracious, equally transcendental. Of what wonders are not we the theatre by the love of Jesus! We are lost in God. We are heavens on earth already, we, even we, who miserably know ourselves to be what we really are. Let us collect ourselves within our own souls, and hushing every

noise of earthly care and worldly wish, let us refresh ourselves with the odour of Jesus haply still within us, and worship Him in the silent interior temple from which He has but just withdrawn, and where the fragrance of His incense is clinging still to the flesh-built walls.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 457-459, 460, 461.

LXVIII

CORPUS CHRISTI

Let us suppose it to be the feast of Corpus Christi. We have risen with one glad thought uppermost in our minds. It gives a colour to everything round about us. It is health to us even if we are not well, and sunshine though the skies be dull. At first there is something of disappointment to us, when we see our dear country wearing the same toilsome look of commonplace labour and of ordinary traffic. We feel there is something wrong, something out of harmony in this. Poor London! if it knew God, and could keep holy-days for God, how it might rejoice on such a day, letting the chains of work fall from off its countless slaves of Mammon, and giving one whole sun to the deep childlike joy in a mystery which is the triumph of faith over sight, of spirit over matter, of grace over nature, and of the Church over the world. But somehow our very disappointment causes us to feel more touchingly the gift of faith, and the sense of our own unworthiness which makes it such a wonder that God should have elected us to so great a gift. O sweet Sacrament of Love! we belong to Thee, for Thou art our Living Love Himself. Thou art our well of life, for in Thee is the Divine Life Himself, immeasurable, compassionate, eternal. To-day is Thy day, and on it there

shall not be a single thought, a single hope, a single wish, which shall not be all for Thee!

Now the first thing we have to do is to get the spirit of the Feast into us. When this is once accomplished we shall be better able to sound some of the depths of this salutary mystery. Nay, the whole theology of the grand dogma of the Eucharist is nothing less than angelic music made audible to mortal ears; and when our souls are attuned to it we shall the better understand the sweet secrets which it reveals to our delighted minds. Calderon says well, in one of his Autos Sacramentales, that he who, on this great day of God, can keep his senses, is in reality beside himself.

Que en el gran dia de Dios, Quien noes ta loco, no es cuerdo.

This is a voice from a land of faith. But we must go far away in order to catch the spirit of the Feast. We must put before ourselves as on a map the aspect which the whole Church is presenting to the eve of God to-day. Our great city is deafened with her own noise; she cannot hear. She is blinded with her own dazzle; she cannot see. We must not mind her: we must put the thought of her away, with sadness if it were any other day than this, but to-day, because it is to-day, with complete indifference.

Oh! the joy of the immense glory the Church is sending up to God this hour: verily! as if the world was all unfallen still. We think, and as we think, the thoughts are like so many successive tide-waves filling our whole souls with the fulness of delight, of all the thousands of Masses which are being said or sung the whole world over, and all rising with one note of blissful acclamation from grateful creatures to the Majesty of our merciful Creator. How many glorious processions, with the sun upon their banners, are now winding their way round the squares of mighty cities, through the flower-strewn streets of Christian villages.

through the antique cloisters of the glorious cathedral, or through the grounds of the devout seminary, where the various colours of the faces and the different languages of the people are only so many fresh tokens of the unity of that faith, which they are all exultingly professing in the single voice of the magnificent ritual of Rome! Upon how many altars of various architecture, amid sweet flowers and starry lights, amid clouds of humble incense, and the tumult of thrilling song, before thousands of prostrate worshippers, is the Blessed Sacrament raised for exposition, or taken down for benediction! How many blessed acts of faith and love, of triumph and of reparation, does not each of these things surely represent! The world over, the summer air is filled with the voice of song. The gardens are shorn of their fairest blossoms to be flung beneath the feet of the Sacramental God. The steeples are reeling with the clang of bells: the cannon are booming in the gorges of the Andes and the Apennines; the ships of the harbours are painting the bays of the sea with their show of gaudy flags; the pomp of royal or republican armies salutes the King of kings. The Pope on his throne and the school-girl in her village, cloistered nuns and sequestered hermits, bishops and dignitaries and preachers, emperors and kings and princes, all are engrossed to-day with the Blessed Sacrament. Cities are illuminated; the dwellings of men are alive with exultation. Joy so abounds that men rejoice they know not why, and their joy overflows on sad hearts, and on the poor, and the imprisoned, and the wandering. and the orphaned, and the homesick exiles. All the millions of souls that belong to the royal family and spiritual lineage of St. Peter are to-day engaged more or less with the Blessed Sacrament: so that the whole Church Militant is thrilling with glad emotion, like the tremulous rocking of the mighty sea. Sin seems forgotten; tears even are of rapture rather

than of penance. It is like the soul's first day in heaven; or as if earth itself were passing into heaven, as it well might do, for sheer joy of the Blessed Sacrament.—" The Blessed Sacrament," 4-7.

LXIX

BENEDICTION

Benediction is as it were the evening sacrifice, as it is when noon is past that it is most usually given. It is as if the sense and instinct of Catholic devotion would fain fill the afternoon with the Blessed Sacrament, as Mass fills the morning, as if it could not wait from morning to morning without some manifestation or use of the Sacramental Jesus, or at least without Him could not keep His own feasts, or those of His Mother, the angels, or the saints. Moreover, as if to correspond to this affectionate craving in the multitude of believers, the Church seems with the more facility and abundance to allow the various worships of the Blessed Sacrament, in proportion as the wickedness, heresy, and ignorance of the world outrage and blaspheme the mystery of love. St. Philip Neri once beheld our Lord in the Host at Exposition giving benediction to the kneeling crowd, as if it were the natural attitude and customary occupation of His goodness in the Blessed Sacrament. It would be difficult to find words to express the greatness or the reality of the graces which our dear Lord imparts to us at Benediction. They fall not only on the cares and sorrows, the troubles and temptations, the faults and unworthinesses, which we venture to spread before Him at the moment: but they light also on all the weak points of our soul of which we ourselves are ignorant, and on our present circumstances the danger of which we are unable to perceive, and on the evil spirits around us, making them stupid and nerveless, and on our dear guardian angel, rewarding him for his charitable toils, and enlightening and invigorating him in his blessed office. We must remember also that the grace of Benediction is not only in the faith and love which it excites in our souls, great as is that boon, but that it comes from Him, solid, powerful, and substantial, purifying and creative, because it participates in the reality of the Blessed Sacrament itself. Everything which has to do with this mystery enters behind the veils into this awful reality, and thus has a characteristic life, which is like nothing else in our devotions. In this reality lies the attraction of the Blessed Sacrament.

This is not the place to enter upon the practices which holy men have devised for Benediction. Every one will follow the bent of his own devotion. So much may be said: the Gospels mention three especial benedictions of our Lord, and to some one or other of these we may spiritually unite all the Benedictions of the Blessed Sacrament which we receive. One while He blesses little children, as in the tenth chapter of St. Mark, and we may in spirit prostrate ourselves beneath the shadow of His outstretched sacramental arms, as if we were little ones, and desired nothing so much from Him as an increase of that childlike simplicity, with which He Himself is so intensely pleased. Again we read that at the Ascension, when He was parted from the apostles, He lifted up His hands and blessed them, and at once their sorrow was turned into exceeding joy, and their timidity into bravest zeal for souls. There are times and duties when we are fain to have these graces of joy and zeal multiplied in our sad and weary souls. Again, there is the doomsday benediction which He describes Himself as giving: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, enter into the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world." We may unite ourselves to this benediction to obtain the grace of final perseverance, the dearest of His gifts because it is one so altogether His.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 508-510.

LXX

OUR VISITS TO THE HIDDEN GOD

How beautiful is the silent patient life of that prison-house of love! Everything about our Lord has such endurance! It does not come and go like a transient flash of grand lightning, deepening the darkness of the night. It is not a visitation which is over before we have realized it. But just as He stood quietly among His apostles in the amazing beauty of His Resurrection, and said, "Handle Me and see," so does He abide with us in the Blessed Sacrament, that we may get to know Him, to outlive our tremulous agitation, and the novelty of our surprise, and to grow familiar with Him, if we can, as our life-long Guest. There we can bring our sorrows and cares and necessities at all hours, when there is no ceremonial of the Church. We can choose our own time, and our visit can be as short or as long as duties permit or as love desires. There is an unction and a power in the mere silent companionship of the Blessed Sacrament which is beyond all words. Members of religious communities accustomed to sleep under the same roof with the Blessed Sacrament, know the feeling of anxious loneliness and the sense of some unsatisfied want when they are away from home. The feverishness of Good Friday passes upon their spirits, when they are staying where there is no Blessed Sacrament in the house.

The ways of visiting the Blessed Sacrament must be as various as the souls of men. Some love to go there to

listen; some to speak; some to confess to Him as if He were their Priest; some to examine their consciences, as before their Judge; some to do homage as to their King; some to study Him as their Doctor and Prophet: some to find shelter as with their Creator. Some rejoice in His Divinity, others in His Sacred Humanity, others in the mysteries of the season. Some visit Him on different days by His different titles, as God, Father, Brother, Shepherd, Head of the Church, and the like. Some visit to adore, some to intercede, some to petition, some to return thanks, some to get consolation; but all visit Him to love, and to all who visit Him in love He is a power of heavenly grace and a fountain of many goods, no single one of which the whole created universe could either merit or confer.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 510, 511.

LXXI

THE MYSTERY OF LOVE

The Blessed Sacrament is not a mystery of distance or of terror, but one of the most dear familiarity. Yet the only true test of our loving familiarity is the depth of our joyous fear. Sacred things and sacred ceremonies, simply because they are things and ceremonies, may become common to us, though they ought not to do so. They may cease to make an impression, and it may be difficult for us always to be recollected in their presence, without this difficulty being a symptom of any very grave spiritual disease. But it is not so with the presence of our Lord's own Self. We cannot become so familiarized with His Sacramental Presence as to be careless and unimpressed, without its betokening a most lamentable and dangerous state of

spiritual tepidity. It is very common even for heretics to have a strange sensation come over them in Catholic churches, which they do not understand and cannot analyse; and shall we be less moved than they? Yet alas! whenever we hear or read some of the great things concerning the Blessed Sacrament, does it not often flash upon us that our conduct is not in keeping with our creed, and looking back on a long sad line of indifferent Communions, distracted Masses, and careless visits to the tabernacle, are we not sometimes startled into saying, Do I really believe all this? How many of us might simplify our spiritual lives and so make great progress, if we would only look to the Blessed Sacrament, to our feelings and conduct towards it, and its impression upon us, as the index of our spiritual condition! We are always trying to awaken ourselves with new things, new books, new prayers, new confraternities, new states of prayer; and our forbearing Lord runs after us and keeps blessing us in our changeableness and humouring us in our fickle weakness: how much better would it be to keep to our old things, to hold fast by Him, and to warm ourselves only at the tabernacle fire.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 45, 46,

LXXII

THE MAGNET OF SOULS

THE Blessed Sacrament is the magnet of souls. There is a mutual attraction between Jesus and the souls of men. Mary drew Him down from heaven. Our nature attracted Him rather than the nature of angels. Our misery caused Him to stoop to our lowness. Even our sins had a sort of attraction for the abundance of His mercy and the predilection of His grace. Our repentance wins Him to us.

Our love makes earth a paradise to Him; and our souls lure Him, as gold lures the miser, with irresistible fascination. This is the attraction on our side. On the other hand, He draws us to Himself by grace, by example, by power, by lovingness, by beauty, by pardon, and above all by the Blessed Sacrament. Every one who has had anything to do with ministering to souls has seen the power which Jesus has. Talent is not needed. Eloquence is comparatively unattractive. Learning is often beside the mark. Controversy for the most part repels. But the simple preaching of Jesus Christ and Him Crucified will collect a congregation, fill a church, crowd the confessionals. furnish the altar-rail, and solemnize a feast, when nothing else will do so. There is not a power on earth to be compared to the simple and unadorned preaching of the Gospel. Sermons on Jesus, and affectionate expositions of His mysteries, will make men perform their ordinary actions and relative duties more perfectly than direct instructions on those very things. All the attraction of the Church is in Jesus, and His chief attraction is the Blessed Sacrament.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 472, 473.

LXXIII

A SPECIAL DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

As it is a kindred mystery to the Incarnation and almost a part of it, or rather its very complement, the Blessed Sacrament may be truly and reverently regarded as the subject of what we call a special devotion. For example, some people can keep themselves in the presence of God anywhere, in their own rooms or in the crowded streets, as well as in church and before the tabernacle. The Blessed Sacrament does not seem to be necessary to their devout recollection or to the fervour of their prayers. At the time, the fact of their being in church does not seem to exercise any discernible influence on their devotion. Others, again, find the utmost difficulty in praying well anywhere except before the Blessed Sacrament. Prayer is quite another thing to them when they are in church. However much outward duties and distractions, or internal conflicts and struggles, may have caused them to lose the sensible presence of God, they are no sooner before our Lord than they are calmed almost without their own co-operation; all disquietude is allayed, and the spirit of prayer triumphantly resumes its happy empire over their minds. The Blessed Sacrament is to the latter class of people something which it is not to the former, and yet the former may be in a far higher spiritual condition.

Again, some persons will by preference say Mass at an altar where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved; because they find themselves so much more fervent and recollected there. Others will by preference say Mass where it is not reserved, because they realize our Lord's Sacramental Presence with such an absorbing intensity of faith that it disturbs them, makes it difficult for them to observe with the proper calm attention the minute ceremonies and rubrics of the Mass, and hinders for the moment their realizing the Sacrifice. Others, again, experience a distinct loss of sensible devotion at High Mass or in great functions, because the lights, incense, vestments, and actions of the sacred ministers, combined with the tumult of the music, seem to disturb and disarrange the quiet supremacy of the Tabernacle; while multitudes of excellent persons experience none of these three things.

Obviously these are three modes in which a special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament variously discloses itself.

Again, there are some, with a really tender and intense devotion to the Passion, who actually do not know what to do with themselves on Good Friday, because there is no Blessed Sacrament, and whose minds are occupied less with the mystery of our Lord's Death or the expectation of His Resurrection, than by the thought of the many sacristies in which the Blessed Sacrament is lying hid to be ready as viaticum for those in their agony. Their thoughts are haunting these hiding-places, with a feeling of almost perverse devotion, seeing that the Church so studiously withdraws them from our homage and our gaze. Sometimes members of a community, from which the Blessed Sacrament is temporarily withdrawn for some unavoidable reason, feel so unhinged, that the observance of their rule, or the practices of penance, or even acts of obedience which do not appear to have so much as a remote connection with the Blessed Sacrament, are almost impossible, or require an absurdly disproportioned effort, just as a family goes wrong in slight things when its master is away; while in the same community others are merely deploring one means of grace suspended, one spiritual exercise intermitted.

To some the crucifix is almost cold, because the Blessed Sacrament is so completely their all in all. Others feel as if in some hidden way all their devotion to our dear and holy Mother arose out of the Blessed Sacrament and returned into it again. Some saints and great contemplatives have shaped their whole lives upon an imitation of the abasements of the Blessed Sacrament. Others, in a more simple and unmystical expression of their love, have bound themselves by vow to do all they can to promote the knowledge and love of this great Sacrament, and have devoted their time, talents, and energies to this end in a more common-place way. Some families of the spouses of Christ live only to make reparation to our Lord for the indignities

committed against that one manifestation of His mercy and hidden majesty. Several give all the indulgences they gain to the soul that in lifetime had most devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. To some God has given the gift of discerning by a feeling in their soul where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, to others of detecting by the taste a consecrated from an unconsecrated Host, and to others of being led to the tabernacle of our Hidden Love by the smell of His indescribable fragrance.

The predestination of some, as of the Martyrs of Gorcum, was that they should lay down their lives for the Blessed Sacrament. Some have been communicated by our Lord Himself, others by angels; others see visions and beautiful apparitions in the Host; others receive our Lord through their flesh, in the same way as He passed with His glorified Body through closed doors after the Resurrection. This was the privilege of St. Juliana Falconieri. Others are raised up to make revelations to the Church about it, as the feast of Corpus Christi was revealed through St. Juliana of Retinne, just at a time when the insidious poison of secret infidelity and Ghibelline irreligion was ravaging the world; as if infidelity made supernatural demonstrations on the part of the Church all the more seasonable, contrary to the ideas of human prudence, just as it has pleased God to confront the unbelief of our own day by the definition of the Immaculate Conception. Others have their natural life nourished and sustained by the Blessed Sacrament, like St. Philip Neri and many servants of God. It was given to St. Pascal Baylon that his dead body should teach this devotion, by knocking in its coffin whenever the Host was elevated in the church where it was. These were the famous Colpi di San Pasquale, about which so much has been said and written.

All these are so many developments and disclosures of

a special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, which are plainly quite different from the direct and necessary worship of it which is an essential part of the Christian religion, and cannot be confounded with the devotion. They are badges and tokens which distinguished particular good persons from the great multitude of the good. At the least they show a particular turn of mind, a particular taste in devotion, an unusual delight in and apprehension of particular doctrines, an intelligent significant choice in sacred things, or the influence of the spiritual genius of a confessor and director. But far more often they indicate a secret but undeniable attraction of the Holy Ghost, or it would seem sometimes an almost magnetic attraction from our dearest Lord Himself beneath His sacramental veils. This has often begun, and grown up, and almost stereotyped a man's whole spiritual life, before he was aware of it; the very attraction partaking of the secrecy which characterizes the mystery itself. . . .

When we speak, therefore, of the Blessed Sacrament being the subject of a special devotion, we mean, not the Sacrifice, nor the Communion, but the Sacramental Life of our Lord, the residence of Jesus amongst us under the mystic veils of the species. The presence of God is as it were the atmosphere of the spiritual life, and the practice of His presence includes and combines all the practices of devotion; and just as God's putting on a visible nature in the Incarnation enabled men to picture Him to themselves and to avoid idolatry, so to many souls the practical, though not absolute, omnipresence of the Sacred Humanity in the Blessed Sacrament supplies them with a practice of the divine presence, which in their case far surpasses what they could attain by endeavouring to realize the spiritual presence of God. The Blessed Sacrament does for the immensity of God what the Incarnation does for His invisibility. It is this life of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament which is the subject of a special devotion.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 115-119, 124.

LXXIV

EUCHARISTIC GRACES

THE love of the Blessed Sacrament is the grand and royal devotion of faith; it is faith multiplied, faith intensified, faith glorified, and yet remaining faith still, while it is glory also. And out of it there come three especial graces which are the very life and soul of an interior life, an overflowing charity to all around us, a thirst to sacrifice ourselves for God, and a generous filial love of Holy Church. The very joyousness of having Jesus with us, of being in actual and delighted possession of Him, renders us full of love to others. Happy ourselves, and with a happiness so exquisite and abounding, we are anxious to make others happy also. To be full of love is in itself a pain, if we have no vent by which we can pour out of our fulness over others. To our ignorance something of this sort seems the reason why God created the world, in order to communicate His own perfections to His creatures. Moreover, we want our love to touch Jesus Himself and to do Him good. We wish to satisfy our own love by showing our love to Him, in the ways which He Himself has ordained and honours with His acceptation. All this points to the poor, the desolate, the afflicted, whom He has put in His own room since He ascended into heaven. On days of joy and in moments of triumphant festivity, then it is that the skilful fathers of the poor know how to lay sweet siege to the hearts of men, and with gentle craft to win their wealth from them for the little ones of Christ; and none are such generous

givers, whether it be to the adornment of the material shrines of God, or to those more beautiful living temples, the poor and sorrowing, as those who are distinguished by an especial devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Charity is the choicest as well as the most exuberant emanation from the adorable Host.

Again, in order to be spiritual, we need a thirst to sacrifice ourselves for God and Jesus Christ. Self-sacrifice is of the very essence of holiness. Love is impatient of secrecy, at least of being concealed from its object. It longs to testify itself, and the stronger and purer it is, the more does it desire to testify itself in different and heroic ways. Nay, love needs self-sacrifice as an evidence to itself of its own earnestness and intensity. How little have we given up for our dearest Lord, and how we burn to sacrifice ourselves in some way for Him. There are times when we seem to desire nothing in life but to suffer for the sake of Jesus, times when pain and sacrifice appear, not desirable only, but absolute necessities, so vehemently does love work within us. There are saints with whom these moods are almost habitual, following far off, for the sake of Jesus and by His grace, that unbroken renunciation of self which was the characteristic of His Thirty-Three Years. Now devotion to the Blessed Sacrament has a special power to communicate this divine spirit. The Eucharist is a sacrifice, as well as a sacrament; no wonder the spirit of sacrifice goes out from it, and is contagious among loving souls. But it is not out of the meekness and sweetness and gentleness and bashful humility of love that this ardent desire of sacrifice arises: but out of love's boldness, its victory, its warlike prowess, its sense of triumph.

Once more; the spiritual life requires also a generous filial love of Holy Church. People in these days often try to draw a distinction between what is spiritual and what is ecclesiastical in the Christian religion; and obviously for many purposes, and from many partial points of view, such a distinction is very capable of being drawn. But the two cannot be separated the one from the other; they lie together practically inseparable. Hence there is no interior or mystic life, not even in the cloister, which is not distinguished by a vivid interest in the vicissitudes of the Church, an inveterate attachment to her external and ceremonial observances, and quite a supernatural sympathy with the fortunes of the Holy See. Love of God and love of Rome are inseparable. To obey Peter is the same thing as to serve Jesus.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 23-25.

LXXV

THE CONDESCENSIONS OF THE EUCHARIST

THE Incarnation for a fallen race, with the humiliations of our Lord's Thirty-Three Years, seemed to carry the divine condescension to the lowest depth. But the Blessed Sacrament contrives to carry it lower still. Its littleness is more wonderful; its ignominies more mysterious; its humiliations more manifold and continual. It is an exact parallel of the Incarnation, adding to each branch of that mystery some additional features of loving abasement and inexplicable condescension. No union between the Creator and the personal creature has been devised so awfully intimate as the sacramental union; neither has the creature in any other mystery been lifted to such a height as that he should be allowed, with a reality so real that no word is forcible enough to express it, to make his Creator his daily bread. If we wish to select a mystery in which more than another the purely spiritual character of God's operations is peculiarly manifest, there is not one of the faithful who would not on the instant name Transubstantiation; for spirituality, as our Saviour teaches us in the sixth chapter of St. John. is its very excellence and crown. Where also shall we find continuity more marvellous than that Real Presence of our dear Lord which is to be with us all days even unto the end of the world, or where multiplicity more astonishing than in the number of masses daily all the world over, and the countless multitudes of communicants, and of Hosts reposing in our tabernacles?

Nowhere shall we find any mystery which shadows forth so many of the Divine Perfections as the Blessed Sacrament, nor with more amazing clearness and minuteness. We have only to look into any of our common theological or devotional treatises to see how completely the faithful have laid hold of and appropriated this consoling truth. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that, from the contemplation of the Blessed Sacrament alone, we could draw all that we know of God's goodness and dispositions towards us. If we seek for a disclosure of His love, where shall we find it more strikingly or more touchingly than in the Blessed Sacrament? He loved us "to the end," as St. John says when he speaks of the institution of the Holy Eucharist, not to the end of His life only, but, as commentators explain it, to the end of the possibilities of the divine liberality, to the farthest end that love could go, even His love who was God as well as man. It is not only gifts and graces which He gives us here, but He is Himself the gift, Himself the grace. Calvary was not enough. The seven Blood-sheddings fell short of His merciful intent. Our ingratitude does not hinder Him. We have spurned His Cross and crucified Him afresh. We have trampled His Blood beneath our feet, and mixed it up with the mire of sin. Now we shall have another mystery in which we may still outrage Him, while He still keeps wooing us to

His love. Was ever love like this? Was ever love so great? Was ever love so mournfully unrequited?

See too how sweetly the wisdom of God is glassed in the mirror of this heavenly mystery! It was the invention of Jesus to stay in the world even when He was quitting it, to be more than ever with His people when He was going away from them till the end of time, to multiply Himself on earth when He was gone into heaven, and to consecrate the earth with the presence of His Body and Blood when He was elevating them both to their proper place at the Right Hand of the Father, and as it were leaving earth desolate and bare. . . .

What a picture too is the adorable Host of the immensity of God! God by His immensity is in the whole world; Jesus in the whole Host: God is entire in every part of the world, Jesus in every fraction of the Host. One Body is at one time in all Hosts, and in all parts of all Hosts, and that without extension, while His presence is multiplied through the length and breadth of the earth in Hosts almost beyond number; and everywhere is the Blessed Sacrament rendering a homage to the omnipresence of God, worthy of it and equal to it. So that while we admire in the Blessed Sacrament the extreme littleness to which the Eternal Word has reduced Himself, that very littleness is such an image of the Divine Immensity as is not to be found elsewhere in all creation.

But if the littleness of the Blessed Sacrament is the reflection of God's immensity, the fragility of the adorable Host is no less the image of God's eternity. For the bread we eat is nothing less than eternal life. We cannot break it, divide it, diminish it, corrupt it, even though we eat it. It is whole and equal in each part, and a million others eat it with us, and will continue to eat it until the end of time: and then He will still remain the bread of life, Himself the

life eternal. Nay, this seeming frailty is so strong that it can hinder and destroy eternal death, and make even our corruptible flesh incorruptible at the last. He whom we adore in that Blessed Sacrament is Himself the judge upon whom our entrance into eternal life depends; and that Blessed Sacrament is itself the energy of our glorious resurrection.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 38-40, 41.

LXXVI

THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Ir the Blessed Sacrament is the greatest work of God, the most perfect picture of Him, and the most complete representation of Jesus, it must needs follow that it is the very life of the Church, being not only the gift of Jesus, but the very living Jesus Himself. This is true, whether we look at the Blessed Sacrament in our relation to it, or in its relation to us; in other words, whether we look at it as a devotion or as a power; and it is twofold as a devotion, and twofold as a power, in that it is both Sacrifice and Sacrament.

Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament is the queen of all devotions. It is the central devotion of the Church. All others gather round it, and group themselves there as satellites; for others celebrate His mysteries; this is Himself. It is the universal devotion. No one can be without it, in order to be a Christian. How can a man be a Christian who does not worship the living Presence of Christ? It is the devotion of all lands, of all ages, of all classes. National character makes no impression on it. It is not concerned with geography, or blood, or the influence of government. It suits no one rank, or trade, or profession, or sex, or

individual temperament, more than another. How can it, for it is the worship of God turned into a devotion by the addition of the sacramental veils? It is, moreover, our daily devotion. All times are its own. As a sacrifice, it is the daily expiation, and as a sacrament, the daily bread of the faithful. It is the cause and the object of many religious orders, whose whole lives and energies it simply engrosses to itself.

There is incessant adoration of it ever going on in the Church. There are many cities where the Blessed Sacrament is only taken down in one church when it is put up in another, and night and day the inhabitants watch and pray before it. In many convents, through the silent night, gentle victims of reparation weep and worship before the lonely tabernacle. In many countries pious seculars, men and women, are banded in association to take hours of adoration in succession, wherever they may be. Here and at the antipodes, if we count both sides of the earth at once, through the four-and-twenty hours there is uninterrupted Mass. What with preparation for Mass and Communion, and what with thanksgiving, if we could see the whole world at any given hour, we should see multitudes deeply absorbed in the Blessed Sacrament.

Nor less wonderful is its power over private life. It is at all hours making all men happier, because it is hindering sin, sweetening bitterness, calming angry tempers, soothing sorrows, and engendering countless works of mercy. Social life, with marriage and its domestic institutions, is always feeling its hallowing influence; and it is ever multiplying peace in the political world between governments and the governed. It can even attract heretics by a kind of spell, and in gentle but erring hearts it silently preaches itself, sweetly constraining more souls into Peter's fold than the close reasonings of the controversialist or the greater influ-

ence of the hot words of a true preacher of Jesus Crucified. Its alliance with the deep spiritual life of interior souls is unbroken, and is continually leading to the heights of self-renunciation and the wonders of supernatural prayer. The ordinary world, the moral, social, political, literary, devotional, ecclesiastical, and mystical world,—the Blessed Sacrament is brooding over them all with fertile, pacific, and creative power throughout the mighty centuries. Thou silent whirlpool of divinest love! how calmly and strongly art Thou ever drawing Thy creatures within the bosom and the inner circles of Thy gracious influence! Oh, swiftly and surely and compassionately draw us down into the depths of everlasting love, down to the very Vision of the most dear and glorious Trinity! Thy Name is Jesus; for Thou shalt save Thy people from their sins.—" The Blessed Sacrament," 502-504.



BOOK III

THE WARFARE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE



LXXVII

"THE LIFE OF MAN UPON EARTH IS A WARFARE"

If the tradition of the Universal Church is harmonious and conclusive on any one point concerning the spiritual life, it is that it is a struggle, strife, combat, battle, warfare, whichever word you may choose. No one doubts it. A man would be out of his senses who should doubt it. Reason proves it, authority proves it, experience proves it. Yet see what an awkward practical question for each one of us rises out of this universal admission. At any moment we may turn round upon ourselves and say, Is my religious life a struggle? Do I feel it to be so? What am I struggling against? Do I see my enemy? Do I feel the weight of his opposition? If my life is not sensibly a fight, can it be a spiritual life at all? Or rather am I not in one of the common delusions of easy devotion and immortified effeminacy? If I am not fighting, I am conquered; and surely I can hardly be fighting, and not know it. These are very serious questions to ask ourselves, and we ought to be frightened if at any time we cannot obtain satisfactory answers to them. A good frightening! what an excellent thing it is now and then in the spiritual life! Yet in these

times it seems as if we were all to be invalids in holiness; for spiritual direction expends its efforts in producing a composing silence round about our sick beds, as if the great thing was not to awake us; and the little table near has a tiny homeopathic opiate for each devout scruple as it rises, to lay it to sleep again, as if it were not true that these scruples are often; like the irritability of a patient, signs of returning strength. Is simple convalescence from mortal sin to be the model holiness of the nineteenth century, at least for luckless souls living in the world?

How one comes to love this great huge London, when God has thrown us into it as our vineyard! The monster! it looks so unmanageable, and it is positively so awfully wicked, so hopelessly magnificent, so heretically wise and proud after its own fashion. Yet after a fashion it is good also. Such a multitudinous remnant who have never bowed the knee to Baal, such numbers seeking their way to the light, such hearts grace-touched, so much secret holiness, such supernatural lives, such loyalty, mercy, sacrifice, sweetness, greatness! St. Vincent Ferrer preached in its streets, and Father Colombière in its mews. Do not keep down what is good in it, only because it is trving to be higher. Help people to be saints. Not all who ask for help really wish it, when it comes to be painful. But some do. Raise ten souls to detachment from creatures, and to close union with God, and what will happen to this monster city? Who can tell? Monster as it is, it is not altogether unamiable. It means well often, even when it is cruel. Well-meaning persons are unavoidably cruel. Yet it is often as helpless and as deserving of compassion as it is of wrath and malediction. Poor Babylon! would she might have a blessing from her unknown God, and that grace might find its way even into her Areopagus!

But what does our struggle consist of? Mostly of five

things, and if there were time for it we might write a chapter on each of them. First, there is positive fighting. You see I am letting you off easily. For some would say that the Christian life is always a fight, ever an actual battle; and that doctrine, sought to be verified in your practice, might often be very discouraging. I call it a struggle, and I make positive fighting only one part of it. Secondly, there is taking pains, such as pitching tents, cleaning arms, gathering fuel, cooking rations, reconnoitring. Thirdly, there are forced marches. If I ask you whether you are fighting and you answer, No, but I am footsore, I shall be quite content, and will not tease you any more. I do not even object to an occasional bivouac; it all comes into my large and generous sense of the word warfare. Fourthly, there is a definite enemy. By this I do not mean that you must always know your enemy when you see him. A vice may come and play the spy in the clothes of a dead virtue. But you must have an enemy in view, and know what you are about with him. To invade the world and then look round for an enemy, is not the business-like thing I understand by the spiritual combat. Fifthly, there must be an almost continual sensible strain upon you, whichever of your military duties you may be performing. If you feel no differently on your battle-field from what you used to feel in the hayfield, you will not come up to my mark. These are the five things of which our struggle consists.—"Growth in Holiness," 87-90.

LXXVIII

THE LAND OF THE DIVINE DECREES

To what shall we dare to liken the mind of God? With what shapes of allegory shall we venture to clothe that

infinite eternal object, which is the fountain of all our destinies? To us it looks like some tremendous chain of mountains, whose sublimities are inaccessible, whose heights are hidden always in the darkness, whose shapes are not the shapes of earthly scenery, whose sound and silence are alike terrible, and yet whose sides are always clad in the beautiful repose of radiant light. But it is a chain of mountains which has only one side, one descent. None has ever climbed those heights, nor ever shall. But we know that, if they were surmounted, there would be no descent upon the other side. A vast table-land stretches interminably there into the boundless distance, an unbeginning, uncreated land, of which faith alone, itself a supernatural virtue, can report; and it reports only, together with some few facts, the unchanging peace of awful sanctity, which is the life and joy of God. That is the land of the Divine Decrees. There is the cradle of Eternal Purposes, which were never younger than they are to-day, and needed no cradle, because they had neither beginning, growth, nor change. In the trackless distances of that nameless upland have we ourselves been hidden from all eternity; so that in some sense our nothingness is clothed in the robes of God's eternity. In those untravelled, unimaginable plains the Divine Perfections have been tranquilly occupied with us in unbeginning love, an unbeginning love which does the work of everlasting justice. In those fastnesses, round which a glory of impenetrable darkness hangs, lie the living mysteries of Predestination, of the Divine Permissions, and of that unnamed perfection out of which the gift of Freedom to creatures came. It is a land before whose misty regions we bend our knees in breathless adoration, in prayer which ventures not to clothe itself with words. A sacred horror fills our souls, as we think of the irresponsible power which reigns there, of the mightiness

and the celerity of that all-absorbing will, of the resistless march of that all-devouring glory, of the unfathomable abysses of that incomprehensible secrecy, of the unswerving exactions of that appalling sanctity, and of that amazing plentitude of life to which no creations have been able to add, and which no incarnations could intensify. If the mysteries which we know to lie there undivulged are sc tremendous, what may we not conceive of other grander mysteries which are simply unimagined? Yet one thing we know of that pathless world of the Mind of God, pathless because neither reason of man nor intelligence of angel has ever wandered there, pathless because God Himself traverses it not by any process of remembrance or discourse, but always possesses it in simple act,—one thing we know of it, and cling to; it is that everywhere its vastest solitudes, its furthest-withdrawn recesses, are all resplendent with the most tender justice, and are all beautified by the omnipotence of love. Nothing is small to a God so great: it is this thought which renders so vast a majesty, not tolerable only, but so sweetly intimate and so intensely dear .- "The Precious Blood," 137, 138.

LXXIX

GOD'S MAGNIFICENCE

LET us kneel down before the magnificence of God. It is outstretched as an ocean of manifold Being and yet of indivisible, uncreated Life, intolerable in its splendour, uncircumscribed in its simplicity. His magnificence is the vastness of His beauty, the multitude of His perfections, the coruscations of His sanctity, the impetuosity of His communicativeness, the minuteness of His government, the

strange celestial sweetness of His gifts, the prodigality of His tenderness, the abysses of His incredible condescensions, and the exuberance of His simplicity. These are many words; but the idea is one. Our thought of God's magnificence is as a sea. It changes not; but it changes us while we look upon it. We see the calm of eternity upon its waters, peaceful as an endless evening. Airs from a far country come quivering over its shining tracts, freighted with aromatic odours, which are diffused around and sensibly deepen the tranquillity. Then again the freshness of morning is upon its swaying fields; and a thousand waves crest themselves with foam, and fling up star-showers into the sunlight; and it booms upon the shore; and it makes us feel the gentleness of power which knows how to become terrible; and the visible unexerted omnipotence is an admonition to prayer. Then it clothes itself with the plumage of darkness, and murmurs in the midnight as if it were gone down to a great distance; in order that we may know how different it is when it is felt from what it is when it is seen. Another while it lies grey-green beneath a sunless sky, with snow-capped cliffs around, sovereign when all else is subject, free when all else has lost its liberty, immutable when all else has suffered winter's change. It has also its tempests, more beautiful and more terrible than the glorious storms of earth. Its lightnings make the darkness round it palpable and solid. Its thunders command a universal silence. Its decrees rush after each other in mighty waves of orderly confusion, menacing the land like falling towers, and breaking in dull inarticulate shocks against the precipices of the divine justice. Yet evermore, in storm or calm, there lies upon the ocean the light of the Precious Blood of Jesus, restful as the golden red of evening, hopeful as the rosy flush of dawn. This is the figure of the magnificence of God.

There is nothing more glorious upon earth than magnificence, nothing which more delights the mind or expands the soul, while it gratifies the senses at the same time that it ennobles their pleasure. But among creatures, magnificence is always a revelation of defects. Indeed it not only discloses imperfections, but causes them. It is too great an effort. It calls for sacrifices which had better not be made. It is often obliged to be regardless of justice. It is made up of imprudences. There is for the most part a tyranny about it. Much suffering has generally to be contributed to it: and the suffering falls mostly on those who have not the glory of the magnificence. Moreover, it is debased by ostentation, and disfigured by pretence. Nevertheless it wins the applause of men, and even lives in history. The nations will pardon almost anything to magnificence. It seems to satisfy a want of the soul which is rarely satisfied. refreshes the littleness of the creature; and, even when it is the glory of one man, it is felt as if it were that one man's gift to all mankind. What then must be the beauty and the delight of magnificence, when it is supremely holy? What must be its grandeur where it is natural? How great must be its splendour when it is the normal expression and the simple exercise of innumerable perfections? There is no effort in the magnificence of God, and no display. It is not a higher height rising above the lowlands. It is not a transient demonstration. It is the refulgence of His eternal quietude. It is the brightness of His infinite justice. It is the unchanging aspect of His glorious sanctity. It is the inevitable light of the riches of the Godhead. It is the self-possessed enjoyment of His beatitude. To us all holiness is a form of restraint. We can hardly form to ourselves any other conception of it. If we try to do so, we shall be surprised to find how difficult it is. Think then what holiness must be, where it is a form of largeness, of

prodigality, of boundless freedom! Yet this is the magnificence of God.

Roses grow on briars, say the wise men of the world, with that sententious morality which thinks to make virtue truthful by making it dismal. Yes! but as the very different spirit of piety would say, it is a truer truth that briars bloom with roses. If roses have thorns, thorns also have roses. This is the rule of life. Yet everybody tells us one side of this truth, and nobody tells us the other. A kindhearted man finds life full of joys, for he makes joys of things which else were not joys; and a simple-hearted man can be very joyous on a little joy; and to the pure-hearted man all things are joys. How can the world be an unhappy world, which has so magnificent a God? His magnificence is the fountain of all our joys; for it is the fountain of salvation. Here lies the secret of the inveterate happiness of the world. Even in its fall, it is so implicated in the blessedness of God that it has not a darkness anywhere without its light, nor a bitter without its sweet. God's simple presence is an overflowing of delight. His inanimate creatures have a changeless joy stamped upon their mute features. The multitudinous species of unreasoning creatures, whether they belong to the earth, to the air, or to the waters, plainly revel in life as a joy which fills their natures to the brim. We ourselves have a hundred happinesses, even when we fancy ourselves quite desolate. There is no real desolation except mortal sin. There is too much of God everywhere to allow either of permanent or general unhappiness. He. who can find his joy in God, is in heaven already; only it is a heaven which is not secured to him, unless he perseveres to the end. Yet is it hard to find our joy in God? Rather, is it not hard to find our joy in anything else? The magnificence of God is the abounding joy of life. It is an immense joy to belong to God. It is an immense joy to

have such a God belonging to us. Like the joys of heaven, if it is a joy new every morning when we wake, as new as we had never tasted it before. Like the joys of earth, it is a joy every evening resting and pacifying the soul. But it has a gift of its own besides. For its novelty grows fresher and more striking daily, and its repose more satisfying and more complete. The joy of God's magnificence more than counterbalances all mortal griefs. When I think of His magnificence, of all that His magnificence implies, of its intimate concernment with myself, and of the way in which I am always sinking more and more irretrievably into the abysses of His sovereignty, I often wonder how we can contain ourselves with joy at having such a God.—
"The Precious Blood," 196-199.

LXXX

GOD IS LOVE

The whole creation floats, as it were, in the ocean of God's almighty love. His love is the cause of all things and of all the conditions of all things, and it is their end and rest as well. Had it not been for His love, they never would have existed, and were it not for His love now they would not be one hour preserved. Love is the reading of all the riddles of nature, grace, and glory; and reprobation is practically the positive refusal on the part of the free creature to partake of the Creator's love. Love is the light of all dark mysteries, the sublime consummation of all hopes, desires, and wisdoms, and the marvellous interpretation of God. Light is not so universal as love, for love is in darkness as well as light. Life is less strong than love; for love is the victory over death, and is itself an immortal life. If it pleased God at this moment to destroy the air, the planet

would have wheeled but a few leagues eastward before it would have become the home of universal death and desolation. Myriad myriads of warm and joyous lives would have been extinguished in one inarticulate gasp of choking agonv. Not only would the streets and fields have been strewn with the suffocated dead, but the birds on the wing would have fallen lifeless to the ground. The deep blue waters of the sea would not have screened their multitudinous tribes from the energy of the destroying edict. The subterranean creatures would have been found out and stifled in the crevices of the rocks, the black waters, or the winding wavs beneath the ground. Swift death would have penetrated through the breathing-holes of the earth to the strange fish of Egypt's Artesian wells, and to the fishing-birds of the caverns of Laybach and Carniola. Earth's green vesture would be unrolled, and the fair orb would revolve in space an ugly mass of dull, discoloured matter.

Yet this picture of ruin is but a faint image of what would happen if God withdrew into His own self-sufficient glory, and called off that immensity of gratuitous love with which He covers all creation. For the destruction of the air would be but a material desolation. It would not invade the vast kingdoms of moral beauty, of spiritual life, of natural goodness, of infused holiness, of angelical intelligence, or of the beatitude of human souls. As far as creation is concerned, God, as it were, concentrates all His attributes into one. becomes only one perfection, and that one perfection is to us the whole of God: and it is love. "God is love," says St. John briefly; and after that, nothing more was needed to be said. He has infinite power, boundless wisdom, indescribable holiness, but to us the power, the wisdom, and the holiness come simply in the shape of love. His justice is one of His most ravishing beauties, but it ravishes us by being such a glorious illumination of His love. What looks like justice far off is but a higher kind of love when we come near. To us creatures His infinity, His immensity, His immutability, His eternity are simply love, infinite, immense, immutable, eternal love.—"The Creator and the Creature," 131-133.

LXXXI

THE BOOK OF NATURE

THE fountain of creation is the mind of God. Hence there is a light and odour of eternity even about the most perishable of creatures, or the most evanescent of material phenomena. They reveal God. They are emanations of His wisdom and disclosures of His beauty. They are His works of art, His peculiar thoughts, His music and His poems. There is nothing in creation which does not bring something of His along with it, nothing which a student of God would not recognize for His by the fashion of it, independent of his knowledge that all things are from God. A single tree is a divine poem. It is unimaginable to any creature, to whom the model has not been shown. It is a many-sided wonder, having a deep science in it as well as a deep fountain of beauty. Yet no two trees, even of the same kind, are alike in the interlacing of their branches, the arrangement of their foliage, or their position with regard to the light of the sun, whose beams play silent music on its rising or depressed boughs and amidst its quivering leaves, as fingers play upon the keys.

Yet trees are but one class, an inferior and subordinate class, among the countless poems which form the harmonious unity of creation. When we rise therefore through the rational world into the world of grace, still more complete and awe-inspiring are the creatures of God, regarded as manifestations of His invisible beauty and the literally infinite variety of His simple unity. But it is the lowest creatures which bring most home to us that all creatures have a real dignity, and a significance which entitles them to reverence, simply as being the creatures of God, as having His mark upon them, and savouring of His fragrance, which is as well known to our spiritual senses, as the odour of that flower on earth which we may happen most of all to love. It is but one proof of the consistency of the Scotist theology, that the same school, which gives so dignified a place to creation in its philosophy, should also differ from other schools in treating the beauty of God as a separate divine Attribute in itself. A beauty-haunted mind, such as the minds of poets are, sees the wisdom and the power, the justice and the mercy of God all the more clearly in creation, because it sees them all in the light of God's beauty. For beauty is something more than either wisdom or power, it is something additional to them, the lustre which makes them plain, as the sun makes plain the separate crags of the distant mountain, which in the shade appear to be one smooth and purple mass. A thing might conceivably be wise yet not beautiful, teeming with evidences of power yet repulsive because disproportionate or inharmonious. But all things in nature and grace are beautiful as well as wise, beautiful as well as powerful; and they are beautiful because the beauty of God clings to them in virtue of their origin, and to the very last there is something worshipful in the least of them, because that clinging beauty never altogether leaves them.

From these considerations we gain a view of creation, which in these days it is of great importance to keep before us. The battle-fields of the world change with the history of nations. So is it in the history of intellect. It can

hardly be doubted that the battle-field of faith and unbelief is moving from the Incarnation to the mystery of Creation, from the Divinity of our Lord to the Attributes of God. is true that faith and unbelief are always fighting at all their points of contact; but the thick of the battle now is amidst the facts and difficulties of creation. Hence, a true view of creatures and their significance is of the greatest consequence, as well that we may avoid unintelligently defending what we are not bound to defend, and what may turn out at last to have all along been indefensible, as that we may know better how to defend what otherwise our ignorance might betray. No erudite theologian will refuse to admit that his science owes more to Aristotle, and even to Plato, than it has suffered from them, though he will not be backward to acknowledge that the influence of those two mighty heathen has not been an unmixed benefit. So, in the present circumstances of the world, and looking at theology as the science upon which the practical conversion of souls is based, it seems as if the physical sciences were the natural allies of theology, and a profound study of them an essential part of a theological education.

They are of far greater importance now than metaphysics or psychology, and have connected themselves with a greater number of fundamental questions, while they are also in a state of forwardness and system which renders them much more capable of being used by the theologian. Perhaps it would not be rash even to prophesy that the fresh start and new development of the mental sciences, to which we must all be anxiously looking forward, are waiting for the further advance of certain of the physical sciences, in whose future discoveries mental science will find another starting-point. . . .

We must learn to look at creatures from God's point of view; and we have seen that His own perfections involve the importance of creatures in His sight. If we lay this view aside, our theology will detach itself more and more from the mind and movement of the living generations, and so will abdicate that sovereignty over other sciences, which is not only its lawful heritage, but is now more than ever within its grasp. Better times are coming; yet these times also are very good. All things considered, the times are miraculously good. Their very darkness is in favour of divine things, and the light of all times is already both the produce and the property of that which is divine amongst us. As theology is the science of all others which takes its stand upon the past, so there is no science which has so many duties to the future. It is a living science, not a lifeless standard. It is a life of itself, not a mere measure of other lives; a limit certainly, yet a limit enlarging all other limitations. The vast circuit and wide expansion of scientific discovery is an augury of a yet more magnificent theology, one which will enable us to envy less those scholastic glories in whose sunset we are living. The world of mind may have glacial periods analogous to the geological one; but in this respect they differ, that they are mostly short, and look darker at a distance than they were when they were present.

There are nights in the world's history; but they are more like eclipses than nights, because they are so briet; and moreover there is light enough in their darkness to see with. To a man who lies wakeful, unless he be ill also, the morning always comes suddenly, and earlier than it seemed due. So will it be with that better future of the Church and world, for which we are all looking somewhat wearily, but quite undoubtingly. Even now does not the future at times dart into our very present with a kind of frightening consolation, and break upon our ears in silent hours of inward listening like a song of joy, and of such joy as is not

the joy of our own day, but a joy surprised with its own exceeding joyfulness? We hear evermore the tread of the future, like the footsteps of a benefactor coming to us in our hour of need. The times are good, and on no account to be complained of; but in a wicked world all good times are always better for what they promise, than for what they give. They are times singular and apart, and visibly burdened with a mission, as all good times seem to be to those who live in them, and think. We cannot think without hoping. Thought in God's world is hope, because the world is God's. It is a bright gift, for others' good as well for our own, when we can understand and welcome the future, while it is yet only pushing its fibres under the present, and so to unloving minds seems rather like a disturbance than a quiet blessing.—" Bethlehem," 277-279, 285, 286.

LXXXII

THE WORLD OF SCIENCE

What are all sciences but sparkles of the life God leads in the world of nature and of matter? Every phenomenon is a transparency in the many-coloured mantle in which He has arrayed His immensity. Every law is but a fraction of His will, and therefore a partial revelation of Himself. Yet the sciences are many, and each science has many kingdoms, and each of those kingdoms many provinces, and each province its subdivisions and departments; and the mightiest intellect, in the activities of a long life, is unequal to the exhaustion of one of these departments. Discovery advances with gigantic strides, and at each step rather destroys all limits to our conjectures of our ignorance, than widens the horizon of our knowledge; while at each step it is always adding to the bulk of those beautiful revelations of God,

which are the treasures as well as the records of the sciences. The symmetry of each whole science is another kind of divine revelation, and the connection of the sciences another, and the unity of all collective sciences yet another and more magnificent. God has a life in the wayward uniformities of each wild-flower in the fields, in the inexplicable instinct of each variety of animal and insect, in the quivering orbits of rolling worlds, in the stately stepping of the clouds which march to the music of the upper winds, in every sight and sound and fragrance and taste of nature. All comes, not merely came at the first but comes now, for ever comes out of the mind of God, and is a disclosure to us of His life, holding undisclosed in every atom more mysteries of that life than the countless ones which it discloses.

The material world is as when we look through the pellucid sea, and behold the many-coloured pebbles catching the sunlight and glinting at the bottom, and the fairylike gardens of the ocean flora, and the radiant fauna feeding, or basking, or making beautiful war amidst those submarine groves and rosy shades, and the gauze-like medusæ floating, like the bells out of which the musical sea-murmur is ever ringing as the restless water swings. But the moral world, the world of wills and crimes and virtues, is as when the sun is overcast, and the blue sky is an inky grey, and the rude wind ruffles the waves, and the subaqueous revelation is withdrawn. Yet even there too is an order, and a legitimate recurrence of phenomena, and a beautiful harmony of cycles, and an imposing majesty of law, all full of revelations of that stormy life of unattainted peace which God lives in the wills of men, a life sometimes awfully encrusted with human crime and worthlessness, like the life of unknown brightness which the diamond leads in its unviolated mine. This too is a life of God which we often ponder; and the past lives of every one of us must have written volumes of it in our thoughts, with hardly one sentence in them all which would not feed a hundred controversies, but which for us have done something better in feeding our devotion.

From the right point of view what is the whole of the intellectual world but one enormous realm of inspiration. a singular gifted creation of power and beauty, of eloquence and song, with the life of God deep hidden in its thoughtmines, nay with millions of divine lives flung off in the shining spray of its cataracts of glorious words? In each felicity of the human understanding there is a life of God, in the glow of each discovery a thrill of His eternal jubilee. The philosopher's chains of cogent reasoning, the historian's just and faithful eye and the benignity of his appreciation, the creations of the poet with his glory-nurtured mind and grandeur-haunted imagination, the articulate speaking of the artist's pencil, the chisel of the sculptor filling the dead marble with looks and voices which speak an intelligible eloquence for ages, an eloquence whose silence all nations listen to and understand, the almost creative breath of the Christian statesman's sympathetic science, who is all artists in himself and whose divine occupation reflects a sort of divinity on his mind, the fanciful fabrics of fiction-writers that hang for a few moments across the sky like the gay arches of the rainbow, or, like the transient prismatic belts round the waists of the fluent waterfalls, the new life which the fruitful formality of diligent induction is everywhere calling up, making the old new, and the barren to be the mother of many children,-what are all these but inspirations, pieces of divine life which lose their bloom in our hot hands, plastic things from heaven taking endless shapes, yet never altogether losing the ancestral look and air of their divinity? Wild world of intellect! even amidst its life of riotous beauty and degenerating truth, God lives a life,

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solemn, holy, calm, and nigher to the surface than His life mostly lies.—" Bethlehem," 254-256.

LXXXIII

THE WORLD OF GRACE

In the world of grace the pulses of the divine life are almost visible. Each actual grace is an impulse of the divine will, proceeding out of the depths of an illimitable mercy, an exquisite justice, and an infinite intelligence: and who shall number each day's actual graces on the earth? Each additional degree of sanctifying grace is a still more wondrous mystery; for it is a distinct communication of the divine nature. Yet the drops of a rain-shower, which covered a square league, would scarce equal the number of these additions of grace which souls on earth receive in the course of one solar day. The extraordinary graces of the saints are all different revelations of God. Each saint is a gospel of himself, notably different from all other living gospels, yet harmonizing almost to miracle with them all. Each conversion, and there are thousands daily, is a divine work of art, standing by itself, each in its own way being a heavenly masterpiece. Every Christian deathbed is a world, a complete world, of graces, interferences, compensations, lights, struggles, victories, supernatural gestures. and the action of grand spiritual laws. Each deathbed, explained to us as God could explain it, would be in itself an entire science of God, a summa of the most delicate theology. The varieties of grace in the individual soul are so many infinities of the one infinite life of God. The world of grace is truly the theatre of His visible miracles. "God is marvellous," says Scripture, "in His saints."-" Bethlehem," 256, 257.

LXXXIV

THE CREATURE, MAN

LET us sit down upon the top of this fair hill. The clear sunshine and the bright air flow into us in streams of life and gladness, while our thoughts are lifted up to God, and our hearts quietly expand to love. Beneath us is that beautiful rolling plain, with its dark masses of summer foliage sleeping in the sun for miles and miles away, in the varying shades of blue and green, according to the distance or the clouds. There at our feet, on the other side, is the gigantic city, gleaming with an ivory whiteness beneath its uplifted but perpetual canopy of smoke. The villa-spotted hills beyond it, its almost countless spires, its one huge many-steepled palace, and its solemn presiding dome, its old bleached tower, and its squares of crowded shippingit all lies below us in the peculiar sunshine of its own misty magnificence. There, in every variety of joy and misery, of elevation and depression, three million souls are working out their complicated destinies. Close around us the air is filled with the songs of rejoicing birds, or the pleased hum of the insects that are drinking the sunbeams, and blowing their tiny trumpets as they weave and unweave their mazy dance. The flowers breathe sweetly, and the leaves of the glossy shrubs are spotted with bright creatures in painted surcoats or gilded panoply, while the blue dome above seems both taller and bluer than common, and is ringing with the loud peals of the unseen larks, as the steeples of the city ring for the nation's victory. Far off from the river-flat comes the booming of the cannon, and here, all unstartled, round and round the pond, a fleet of young perch are sailing in the sun, slowly and undisturbedly as if they had a very grave enjoyment of their little lives. What a mingled

scene it is of God and man! And all so bright, so beautiful, so diversified, so calm, opening out such fountains of deep reflection, and of simple-hearted gratitude to our Heavenly Father.

What is our uppermost thought? It is that we live, and that our life is gladness. Our physical nature unfolds itself to the sun, while our mind and heart seem no less to bask in the bright influences of the thought of God. Animate and inanimate, reasoning and unreasoning, organic and inorganic, material and spiritual-what are these but the names and orders of so many mysteries, of so many sciences, which are all represented in this sunny scene? We, like the beetles and the perch, like the larks and the clouds, like the leaves and the flowers, like the smoke-wreaths of the cannon and the surges of the bells, are the creatures of the One True God, lights and shades in this creature-picture, kith and kin to all the things around us, in near or in remote degree. How did we come to live? Why do we live? How do we live? What is our life? Where did it come from? Whither is it going? What was it meant for? All that the sun shines upon is real; and we are real too. Are we to be the beauty of a moment, part of earth's gilding, to warm ourselves in the sun for awhile and glitter, and add to the hum of life on the planet, and then go away, and go nowhere? The beautiful day makes us happy, with a childish happiness, and it sends our thoughts to first principles, to our alphabet, to the beginnings of things. . . .

We are creatures. What is it to be a creature? Before the sun sets in the red west, let us try to have an answer to our question. We find ourselves in existence to-day, amid this beautiful scene, with multitudes of our fellow-creatures round about us. We have been alive and on the earth so many years, so many months, so many weeks, so many days,

so many hours. At such and such a time we came to the use of reason; but at such an age and in such a way that we clearly did not confer our reason upon ourselves. But here we are to-day, not only with a reason, but with a character of our own, and fulfilling a destiny in some appointed station in life. We know nothing of what has gone before us, except some little of the exterior of the past, which history or tradition or family records have told us of. We do not doubt that the sun and the moon, the planets, and the stars, the blue skies and the four winds, the wide green seas and the fruitful earth, were before our time; indeed before the time of man at all. Science unriddles mysterious things about them; but all additional light seems only to darken and to deepen our real ignorance.

So is it with the creature, man. He finds himself in existence, an existence which he did not give to himself. He knows next to nothing of what has gone before; and absolutely nothing of what is to come, except so far as his Creator is pleased to reveal it to him supernaturally. And thus it comes to pass that he knows better what will happen to him in the world to come, than what will be his fortune here. He knows nothing of what is to happen to himself on earth. Whether his future years will be happy or sorrowful, whether he will rise or fall, whether he will be well or ailing, he knows not. It is not in his own hands, neither is it before his eyes. If you ask him the particular and special end which he is to fulfil in his life, what the peculiar gift or good which he was called into being to confer upon his fellow men, what the exact place and position which he was to fill in the great social whole, he cannot tell you. It has not been told to him. The chances are, with him as with most men, that he will die, and yet not know it. And why? Because he is a creature.

His being born was a tremendous act. Yet it was not

his own. It has entangled him in quantities of difficult problems, and implicated him in numberless important responsibilities. In fact he has in him an absolute inevitable necessity either of endless joy or of endless misery; though he is free to choose between the two. Annihilation he is not free to choose. Reach out into the on-coming eternity as far as the fancy can, there still will this man be, simply because he has been already born. The consequences of his birth are not only unspeakable in their magnitude, they are simply eternal. Yet he was not consulted about his own birth. He was not offered the choice of being or not being. Mercy required that he should not be offered it; justice did not require that he should. We are not concerned now to defend God. We are only stating facts, and taking the facts as we find them. It is a fact that he was not consulted about his own birth; and it is truer and higher than all facts, that God can do nothing but what is blessedly, beautifully right. A creature has no right to be consulted about his own creation: and for this reason simply, that he is a creature.

He has no notion why it was that his particular soul rather than any other soul was called into being, and put into his place. Not only can he conceive a soul far more noble and devout than his, but he sees, as he thinks, peculiar deficiencies in himself, in some measure disqualifying him for the actual position in which God has placed him. And how can he account for this? Yet God must be right. And his own liberty too must be very broad, and strong, and responsible. He clearly has a work to do, and came here simply to do it; and it is equally clear that if God will not work with him against his own will, he also cannot work without God. Every step which a creature takes, when he has once been created, increases his dependence upon his Creator. He belongs utterly to God by creation: if words

would enable us to say it, he belongs still more utterly to God by preservation. In a word, the creature becomes more completely, more thoroughly, more significantly a creature, every moment that his created life is continued to him. This is in fact his true blessedness, to be ever more and more enclosed in the hand of God who made him. The Creator's hand is the creature's home.

As he was not consulted about his coming into the world, so neither is he consulted about his going out of it. He does not believe he is going to remain always on earth. He is satisfied that the contrary will be the case. He knows that he will come to an end of this life, without ceasing to live. He is aware that he will end this life with more or less of pain, pain without a parallel, pain like no other pain, and most likely very terrible pain. For though the act of dying is itself probably painless, yet it has for the most part to be reached through pain. Death will throw open to him the gates of another world, and will be the beginning to him of far more solemn and more wonderful actions than it has been his lot to perform on earth. Everything to him depends on his dying at the right time and in the right way. Yet he is not consulted about it. He is entitled to no kind of warning. No sort of choice is left him either of time or place or manner. It is true he may take his own life. But he had better not. His liberty is indeed very great, since this is left free to him. Yet suicide would not help him out of his difficulties. It only makes certain to him the worst that could be. He is only cutting off his own chances; and, by taking his life into his own hands, he is rashly throwing himself out of his own hands in the most fatal way conceivable. One whose business it is to come when he is called, and to depart when he is bidden, and to have no reason given him either for his call or his dismissal, except such as he can gather from the character of his mastersuch is man upon earth; and he is so, because he is a creature. . . .

But to return to our man, whoever he may be. It is of course true that God had a general purpose in the whole of creation, or, to speak more truly, many general purposes. But it is also true that he had a special purpose in this man whom we are picturing to ourselves. The man came into the world to do something particular for God, to carry out some definite plan, to fulfil some one appointed end, which belongs to him in such a way that it does not belong to other men. There is a peculiar service, a distinct glory, which God desires to have from that man, different from the service and the glory of any other man in the world; and the man's dignity and happiness will result from his giving God that service and glory and no other. As he did not make himself, so neither can he give himself his own vocation. He does not know what special function it has fallen to him to perform in the immense scheme and gigantic world of his Creator; but it is not the less true that he has such a special function. Life as it unfolds will bring it to him. Years will lay his duty and his destiny at his door in parts successively. Perhaps on this side of the grave he may never see his work as an intelligible whole. It may be part of his work to be tried by this very obscurity.

But with what a dignity it invests the man, to know of him that, as God chose his particular soul at the moment of its creation rather than countless other possible and nobler souls, so does He vouchsafe to be dependent on this single man for a glory and a love, which, if this man refuses it to Him, He will not get from any other man nor from all men put together! God has an interest at stake, which depends exclusively on that single man: and it is in the man's power to frustrate this end, and millions do so. When we consider who and how infinitely blessed God is, is not this

special destiny of each man a touching mystery? How close it seems to bring the Creator and the creature! And where is the dignity of the creature save in the love of the Creator?

Furthermore, this man, it would appear, might have been born at any hour of the day or night these last five thousand years and more. He might have been before Christ or after Him, and of any nation, rank, or religion. His soul could have been called out of nothing at any moment as easily as when it pleased God in fact to call it. But it pleased God to call it when He did, because that time, and no other time. suited the special end for which that man was to live. He was born, just when he was, for the sake of that particular purpose. He would have been too soon, had he been born earlier; too late, if he had not been born as early. And in like manner will he die. An hour, a place, a manner of death are all fixed for him; yet so as not in the least to interfere with his freedom. Everything is arranged with such a superabundance of mercy and indulgence, that he will not only die just when it fits in with the special work he has to do for God, and the special glory God is to have from him, but he will most probably die at the one hour when it is safest and best for himself to die. The time, the place, the manner, and the pain of his death will in ordinary cases be better for that man than any other time, place, manner, or pain would be. The most cruel-seeming death, if we could only see it, is a mercy which saves us from something worse, a boon of such magnitude as befits the liberality even of the Most High God.

Once again: a particular eternity is laid out for that man, to be won by his own free correspondence to the exuberant grace of his Creator. There is a brightness which may be his for ever, a distinct splendour and characteristic loveliness by which he may be one day known, admired, and

loved, amid the populous throngs of the great heaven. His own place is ready for him in the unutterable rest of everlasting joys. That man, who is gazing on the landscape at his feet, has an inheritance before him, to which the united wealth of kings is poverty and vileness. A light, a beauty, a power, a wisdom, are laid up for him, to which all the wonders of the material creation are worse than tame, lower than uninteresting. He is earning them at this moment, by the acts of love which it seems as if the simple cheer of the sunshine were drawing out of his soul. They have a strange disproportionate proportion to his modest and obscure works on earth. God, and angels, and saints, are all busy with solicitous loving wisdom, to see that he does not miss his inheritance. His eternity is dependent on his answering the special end of his creation. Doubtless, at this moment he has no clear idea of what his special work is; doubtless, it is one of such unimportance, according to human measures, that it will never lav any weight on the prosperity, or the laws, or the police of his country. His light is probably too dim to be visible even to his neighbourhood. Yet with it, and because of it, he is one day to shine like ten thousand suns, far withdrawn within the peace of his satisfied and delighted God !- "The Creator and the Creature," 26, 27, 32-36, 40-42.

LXXXV

OUR WAN'T OF POWER

THE first feature to be noticed in the condition of this creature, man, is his want of power. Not only is his health uncertain, but at his best estate his strength is very small. Brute matter resists him passively. He cannot lift great weights of it, nor dig deep into it. Even with the help of

the most ingenious machinery, and the united labour of multitudes, he can do little but scratch the surface of the planet, without being able to alter the expression of one of its lineaments. Fire and water are both his masters. His prosperity is at the mercy of the weather. Matter is baffling and ruining him somewhere on the earth at all hours of day and night. He has to struggle continually to maintain his position, and then maintains it with exceeding difficulty.

Considering how many thousands of years the race of man has inhabited the world, it is surprising how little control he has acquired over diseases, how little he knows of them, how much less he can do to alleviate them. Even in his arts and sciences there are strangely few things which he can reduce to certainty. His knowledge is extremely limited, and is liable to the most humiliating errors and the most unexpected mistakes. He is in comparative ignorance of himself, of his thinking principle, of the processes of his immaterial soul, of the laws of its various faculties, or of the combinations of mind and matter. Metaphysics, which should rank next to religion in the scale of sciences, are a proverh for confusion and obscurity. Infinite longings perpetually checked by a sense of feebleness, and circumscribed within the limits of a narrow prison,—this is a description of the highest and most aspiring moods of man.

Such is the condition of our man if we look at him in his solitary dignity as lord of the creation. But even this is too favourable a representation of him. His solitary dignity is a mere imagination. On the contrary, he is completely mixed up with the crowd of inferior creatures, and in numberless ways dependent upon them. If left to himself the ponderous earth is simply useless to him. Its maternal bosom contains supplies of minerals and gases, which are meant for the daily sustaining of human life.

Without them this man would die in torture in a few days; and vet by no chemistry can he get hold of them himself and make them into food. He is simply dependent upon plants. They alone can make the earth nutritious to him, whether directly as food themselves, or indirectly by their support of animal life. And they do this by a multitude of hidden processes, many of which, perhaps the majority, are beyond the explanation of human chemistry. Thus he is at the mercy of the vegetable world. The grass that tops his grave, which fed him in his life, now feeds on him in turn.

In like manner is he dependent upon the inferior animals. Some give him strength to work with, some warm materials to clothe himself with, some their flesh to eat or their milk to drink. A vast proportion of mankind have to spend their time, their skill, their wealth, in waiting upon horses and cows and camels, as if they were their servants, building houses for them, supplying them with food, making their beds, washing and tending them as if they were children, and studying their comforts. More than half the men in the world are perhaps engrossed in this occupation at the present moment. Human families would break up, if the domestic animals ceased to be members of them. to the insect world, it gives us a sort of nervous trepidation to contemplate it. The numbers of insects, and their powers, are so terrific, so absolutely irresistible, that they could sweep every living thing from the earth and devour us all within a week, as if they were the fiery breath of a destroying angel. We can hardly tell what holds the lightninglike speed of their prolific generations in check. Birds of prey, intestine war, man's active hostility,-these, calculated at their highest, seem inadequate to keep down the insect population, whose numbers and powers of annoyance yearly threaten to thrust us off our own planet. It is God Himself who puts an invisible bridle upon these countless and irresistible legions, which otherwise would lick us up like thirsty fire.

What should we do without the sea? Earth and air would be useless, would be uninhabitable without it. There is not a year but the great deep is giving up to the investigations of our science unthought-of secrets of its utility, and of our dependence upon it. Men are only beginning to learn the kind and gentle and philanthropic nature of that monster that seems so lawless and so wild. Our dependence on the air is no less complete. It makes our blood, and is the warmth of our human lives. Nay, would it be less bright or beautiful, if it allowed to escape from it, let us say, one gas, the carbonic acid, which forms but an infinitesimally small proportion of it, the gas on which all vegetation lives? It exists in the air in quantities so trifling as to be with difficulty discernible, yet if it were breathed away, or if the sea drank it all in, or would not give back again what it drinks, in a few short hours the flowers would be lying withered and discoloured on the ground, the mighty forests would curl up their myriad leaves, show their white sides, and then let them wither and fall. There would not be a blade of grass upon the earth. The animals would moan and faint, and famished men would rise upon each other, like the maddened victims of a shipwreck, in the fury of their ungovernable hunger. Within one short week the planet would roll on, bright in its glorious sunshine, and its mineral-coloured plains speckled with the shadows of its beautiful clouds, but all in the grim silence of universal death. On what trembling balances of powers, on what delicate and almost imperceptible chemistries, does man's tenure of earth seem to rest! Yes! but beneath those gauzelike veils is the strong arm of the compassionate Eternal!

It would require a whole volume to trace the various ways in which man is dependent upon the inferior creatures. All the adaptations, of which different sciences speak, turn out upon examination to be so many dependencies of man on things which are beneath him. In material respects man is often inferior to his inferiors. But there is one feature in his dependency, which does not concern his fellow creatures, and on which it is of consequence to dwell. There is a peculiar kind of incompleteness about all he does, which disables him from concluding anything of himself, or unassisted. It is as if his arm was never quite long enough to reach his object, and God came in between him and his end to enable him to realize it. Man is ever falling, God ever saving: the creature always on the point of being defeated, the Creator always coming to the rescue opportunely. Thus man plants the tree and waters it, but he cannot make it grow. He prepares his ground and enriches it, he sows his seeds and weeds it; but he cannot govern the weather, or the insects, on which his harvest depends. Between his labour and his labour's reward God has to intervene. When he lays his plans, he does nothing more than prepare favourable circumstances for the end which he desires. In war, in government, in education, in commerce, when he has done all, he has insured nothing. An element has to come in and to be waited for, without which he can have no results, and over which he has no control. Sometimes men call it fate, or fortune, sometimes chance or accident. It is the final thing, it is what completes the circle, or fires the train, or makes the parts into a whole. It is the interference of God, the action of His will. In every department of human life we discover this peculiarity. that of himself, that is with means left at his own disposal. man can approach his end, but not attain it: he can get near it, but he cannot reach it. He is always too short by a little; and the supplement of that littleness is as invariably the gratuitous Providence of God.—"The Creator and the Creature," 44-48.

LXXXVI

WHAT WE REALLY ARE

THE thoughts among which we should live familiarly are such as these. What are we in the order of nature? Simply created out of nothing, and so with no rights but such as come from God's gratuitous covenant. To the degradation of our nothingness we have added the guilt of rebellion. We are inferior to the angels and akin to the beasts; mutable and almost without self-control; subject to sufferings and indignities; helpless in childhood, and dishonourable in old age; our bodies tending to corruption and our souls gravitating heavily to sin. What are we in the order of grace? Without it we are outcasts and exiles. Sanctifying grace is altogether foreign to us, and comes from God; and actual grace must be superadded to habitual, and even then our will can destroy its efficacy. In our best estate self mingles with and mars our holiest actions. We have senses, but it is as much as we can do to keep custody over them; they are sources of temptation and sin, which often tyrannically overbear the soul.' Our understanding is blind and stupid, imprudent, conceited, and in a great measure dependent on our bodily health. Our affections are insubordinate and wild, and their tastes ignoble, continually fastening on low objects. If we could only come to judge ourselves by the same standard according to which we judge others, how royally should we hate ourselves! What would happen if we only demanded, and as severely exacted, from ourselves, what we exact from

others, the same unselfishness all day and night, the same promptitude in generous deeds, the same high principles, the same pure motives! Alas! if we could only look upon ourselves from without, and at the same time have the knowledge of ourselves which we possess from within, we should soon be saints.

If we compare ourselves with a beast, the latter is no spot in God's creation. It is more patient than we are, and apparently has more self-control in pain. It corresponds better to the end of its creation than we do to ours. If we look at ourselves by the side of a fallen angel, he fell but once, and had no room given him for repentance. Many classes of sins are unknown to him, such as gluttony and drunkenness, because of the spirituality of his nature. He pines after God, even in his rebellion. He is without hope, and so has more show of right to be wicked. God does not love him, and the hapless creature knows that He never will love him.

But by God's grace we are kept from great wickedness, and these comparisons do not move us. Then let us measure ourselves by the side of holy men, by their innocence or heroic penance, by their generous zeal and arduous labours for God and souls, by their self-sacrifice and perseverance. Or let us take the angels, and think of their strength, their beauty, their understanding, their power, the wonderfulness and purity of their spiritual nature and its gifts. Cast an eye on our Blessed Lady, who is a mere creature, and sum up her dignity, her sanctity, her prerogatives, her sinlessness, her present empire. Kneel before the Sacred Humanity of Jesus, and scrutinize its definite grace, its merits, its beauty, its elevation, its Body, its Soul, its Union with the Word, and how it is the apex of the universe, the culminating point of all creation. Or go walk by the shore of that unresounding sea, the Immense and Incomprehensible God, cast a bewildered glance over the awful infinite abyss of His Perfections, known and named, or unknown and unnamed. And then, poor heart! think on what thou hast been, from youth upward, in thought, feeling, and act; think of what thou art at this moment to the eye of God, even as thou knowest thyself, (and how little dost thou know!) and think of what at best thou art likely to be!

We could wrestle better with the human spirit, if we could keep ourselves down more. We sun ourselves in the brightness of high things, and this tells upon us like the enervating climate of southern latitudes upon the children of the north.—" Growth in Holiness," 195-197.

LXXXVII

"THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD"

There is no poem in the world like a man's life, the life of any man, however little it may be marked with what we call adventure. For real life, even the most commonplace, is strong-featured, if we look at it attentively. No poet would so dare to mingle sweetness and strangeness, simplicity and peculiarity, sublimity and pathos, as real life mingles them together. The characters of the poet either stand out from the common lot of men as exceptional cases, or else lose distinguishable individuality altogether. But a man's real life is at once a bolder and a simpler thing than the creation of the poet. It is like a grand heavenly recitative, which Providence itself pronounces as the years go on with a sort of eloquent dramatic silence, from one point of view inventive as the improvisatore, from another merely interpreting the waywardness of a man's own will.

True however it is, that the very barrenest life of man that ever was lived is, if we take the inward and the outward together, a truly divine poem, to which he who listens becomes wise. Each single human life in the world amounts to nothing less than a private revelation of God, a revelation which would be enough for the whole world, if an inspired pen recorded it. But when a man is living in a state of grace, and is giving himself up to God and leading an interior life, then his secret biography becomes still more wonderful, because it is more consciously supernatural. Most inwardliving men have some special attraction of grace, some divine mould in which their spiritual lives are cast, a mould which God uses, not for classes, but for individuals. Each man stands in a relation to God which is peculiar to himself. He shares it with no other man. He has had more graces or fewer, larger or smaller, of a different character, and blending differently with the varving circumstances of his outward life. These external circumstances are never the same to any two men, as far as we can see. The alternations of bright and dark are differently distributed to each, so that each outward life forms a different amalgamation with grace from any other outward life. The very geography of a man's life changes his grace. If God allows the angels to behold the multiform lives of men in a clear light from His point of view, the world must be to them almost like a second beatific vision; such a glorious and bold revelation must it be to them of the inaccessible character of the Creator.— "Bethlehem," 227, 228.

LXXXVIII

THE END OF MAN

IF we take all the peculiarities of the creature and throw them into one, if we sum them all up and express them in the ordinary language of Christian doctrine, we should say that they came to this, -that as man was not his own beginning, so also he is not his own end. His end is God; and man belies his own position as a creature whenever he swerves from this his sole true end. Every one knows what it is to have an end, and how much depends upon it. To change a man's end in life is to change his whole life, to revolutionize his entire conduct. When he sees his aim distinctly before him, he uses his sagacity in planning to attain it, his courage in removing the obstacles which intervene, and his prudence in the selection of the means by which he is eventually to succeed. More or less consistently, and more or less incessantly, the man's mind and heart are occupied about his end. It forms his character, it possesses his imagination, it stimulates his intellect, it engrosses his affections, it absorbs his faults, it is his measure of failure and success, it is ever tending to be his very standard of right and wrong. A creature, in that it is a creature, is like a falling stone. It seeks a centre, it travels to an end, irresistibly, impetuously. This is its law of life. Hence it is that the end gives the colour to the creature's life, describes it, defines it, animates it, rules it. This is true of pleasure, of knowledge, of wealth, of power, of popularity, when they are sought as ends. They lay passionate hold upon a man, and make him their slave, and brand their mark all over him, and the whole world knows him to be theirs.

But all this is still more true when man makes God, what God has already made Himself, his single and magnificent end. And how glorious are the results in his capacious soul! To make God always our end is always to remember that we are creatures; and to be a saint is always to make God our end. Hence, to be a saint is always to remember, and to act on the remembrance, that we are creatures. Yet, horrible as it sounds when it is put into words, it is the common way of men to make God a means instead of an end, a purveyor instead of a judge, if they make any use of Him at all. He has to forecast for their comforts, to supply their necessities, to pay for their luxuries. All men seek their own, murmured the indignant apostle. To seek the things of Christ was his romance, which worldly disciples did not understand. How few can turn round upon themselves at any given moment of life, when they do not happen to be engaged in spiritual exercises, and can say, "God is my end! At this moment when I unexpectedly look in upon myself, while I was acting almost unconsciously, I find that I was doing what a creature should always be doing,—seeking God. My worldly duties and social occupations were understood to be means only, and were treated accordingly. There was nothing in my mind and heart which partook of the dignity of an end, except God." Yet is it not our simple business? We expect even a dog to come when he is called, and a clock to go when it is wound up; and in like manner God, when He creates us, expects us to seek Him as our only end and sovereign good.—" The Creator and the Creature," 55, 56.

LXXXIX

"AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM"

EAGERNESS for the glory of God is the first and fundamental truth of religion: that we are here in the world for no other

end than to glorify God by the salvation of our souls. This is our single purpose, our one work; all else is beside the mark. All other creatures either help us or hinder us in this one work, and must be dealt with accordingly. From this first principle, and by the two precepts of love of God and love of our neighbour, we reach the duty of seeking the glory of God in the salvation of our neighbour's soul as well as of our own. Now, it is plain that if we love God we shall be eager for His glory, and the more we love Him the more eager we shall be. What we have set our hearts upon we are sure to follow out hotly and perseveringly. When, then, a man comes to love God devoutly, he becomes what we call a man of one idea. He looks at everything from one point of view. He considers trades and professions as so many necessary evils, as distracting him from his one work. He is seeking everywhere and in everything the glory of God. It is his last thought at night, his first on waking. If he obtains any power, authority, or influence, his first impulse is. How shall I use this to the glory of God? If a calamity befalls him, this is the first question he asks of himself. If a sum of money is left him, this is the first idea it suggests to his mind. He interests himself about the Church and the poor, about education and crime, because these matters are full to overflowing of God's glory. For instance, a man of the world looks at the immense system of railways and steam navigation, which now covers the earth as with a net. He calculates its probable effect on governments, popular rights, science, literature, commerce, civilization. The problem fascinates him. The man of God looks on the same thing, and thinks how it will forward missionary enterprise, how it will bring Catholics together, how it will facilitate communication with the Holy See, which is the freedom of the Church, and how in these, and many like ways, God will have glory out of it all. When a man's mind is engrossed in politics, whether in the government or the opposition, everything that happens comes before him simply with reference to his one absorbing interest. The state of the crops, the chance of a bad harvest, our foreign relations, internal discontent, strikes of workmen, papal bulls—his view of them is, How will they affect the political party with which I am acting? So it is with the man who loves God. His one view of everything, however unlikely, has to do with the glory of God. I do not mean to say that he is always thinking of it with an actual and present intention. That would be almost impossible, almost beyond the condition of man. But I mean that it is his most frequent thought, and that he recurs to it ever and again, as a man does to something he loves affectionately and desires intensely.

Now this is not very hard. There is no austerity in it. We can begin it quietly, take it easily at first, and then let it grow upon us, just as habits will grow. We might make a little prayer to God every morning for love to seek His glory, and for light to find it all day long. We might renew our intention twice a day to seek His glory. We might ask it in Communion, and at the end of our rosaries, and in our examination of conscience. If we often forget it, never mind; it will come by use; and God Himself will begin to help us wonderfully when we have persevered for a few months in the practice. But not before, remember; for this is His way, to wait awhile, and see if we persevere, though He is really helping us all the time, or else we never could persevere; only He will help us in another way later on. This is not hard; yet it would bring us up many miles nearer the saints, and what interests of Jesus would it not advance by the time a year has gone round !-- "All for Jesus." 34-36.

XC

GOD'S HOMELESS GLORY

What is it, then, for which I am pleading? Only for this, that you should not altogether cut yourselves off from the glory of God, as if it was no concern of yours, and that you and He were not in partnership! This is really all. God is going to give you His glory for your own in heaven to all eternity. Surely you cannot altogether disclaim connection with it now: obviously its interests very much concern you, its success must be your success, and its failure your failure too. You cannot stand aloof from the cause of Jesus on earth, and even keep up a sort of armed neutrality with God, when you desire, as soon as ever you die, without so much as tasting the sharpness of Purgatory, to be locked in His closest embrace of unutterable love for evermore. Yet this is the plain English of the lives of most Catholics. Can anything be more unreasonable, more ungenerous, more mean? Yet vou wonder we have not converted England! Verily we do not look like a people who have come to kindle a fire upon the earth, nor to be pining because it is not kindled. Ah, Jesus! these are Thy worst wounds. I think lightly of the ruddy scars of Thy hands and feet, of the bruised knee and the galled shoulder, of the thousandwounded head and the wide-open heart. But these wounds !- the wounds of coldness, neglect, unpraving selfishness!--the wounds of the few that were once fervent and now are tepid, of the multitudes that never were fervent, and so cannot even claim the odious honours of tepidity !-- the wounds wherewith Thou wert wounded in the house of Thy friends! these are the wounds to be wiped with our tears, and softened with the oil of our affectionate compassion. Blessed Lord! I can hardly believe Thou art

what I know Thou art, when I see Thy people wound Thee thus! But my own wretched heart! It too lets me in to sad secrets about man's capability of coldness, and his infinity of ingratitude. Alas! the concluding chapters of the four Gospels,—they read like a bitter jest upon the faithful!

Moreover, we live as if we would petulantly say, "Well, we cannot help it. If Jesus chose to do and to be all this, it is His own affair; we only wanted absolution; we only wanted a machine to be saved by, a locomotive into heaven. the cheapest and roughest that would do the work, and land us at the terminus. You devout people in reality stand in the way of religion. It may be hard for us to define enthusiasm; but you surely are enthusiasts. What we mean is, you are all heart and no head. Mere heat will not do instead of talent. Earnestness is not theology. There are other things to be done in life beside going to Mass and confession. How can we have confidence in people who let themselves be run away with by religious fervour? All this incarnation of a God, this romance of a Gospel, these unnecessary sufferings, this prodigal bloodshedding, this exuberance of humiliations, this service of love, this condolence of amorous sorrow;—to say the truth, it is irksome to us: we are not at home in it at all; the thing might have been done otherwise; it was a matter of debtor and creditor; every one is not a poet; every one cannot take to the romantic. Really there must be a mistake in the matter. God is very good, and His love is very well in its way. Of course He loves us, and of course we love Him. But really, by a little practical common sense, and a few wholesome reasonable precepts, and a strictly conscientious discharge of our relative duties, might we not put this tremendous mythology of Christian love. with all possible respect, a little on one side, and go to heaven by a plain, beaten, sober, moderate path, more accordant to our character as men, and to our dignity as British subjects?" If "the Anglo-Saxon race really fell in Adam," why, obviously, we must take the consequences. Still, let the mistake be repaired in that quiet, orderly way, and with that proper exhibition of sound sense, which are so dear to Englishmen.

Well! if it must be so, I can only think of those bold words of St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi: "O Jesus! Thou hast made a fool of Thyself through love."

Poor desolate glory of God! Thou art a foundling upon the earth! No one will claim thee, or acknowledge kindred with thee. or give thee a home. Cold as the world is, and pitiless the pelting of incessant sin, thou liest crying at our doors, and men heed thee not. Poor homeless glory! earth was meant for thee once as much as heaven, but there have been robbers abroad, and it is no safe travelling for thee along our roads now. But there are some few of us still who have pledged ourselves to heaven, that from this hour we will take thee to our own homes, as John took Mary: "henceforth our substance is thy substance, and all that we have is thine."—"All for Jesus," 89-91.

XCI

OUR VOCATION

THERE are some thoughts which, however old, are always new, either because they are so broad that we never learn them thoroughly, or because they are so intensely practical that their interest is always fresh. Such thoughts are for the most part very common thoughts. They are so large and so tall that they are obvious to all capacities, like the huge mountains which are visible from the plain. They

require no peculiar keenness of vision; for no one can fail to perceive them. Now, among such thoughts we may reckon that thought, which all children know, that God loves every one of us with a special love. It is one of the commonest thoughts in religion, and yet so amazing that, when we come to look steadily at it, we come nigh to not believing it. God does not look at us merely in the mass and multitude. As we shall stand single and alone before His judgment-seat, so do we stand, so have we always stood, single and alone before the eye of His boundless love. This is what each man has to believe of himself. From all eternity God determined to create me, not simply a fresh man, not simply the son of my parents, a new inhabitant of my native country, an additional soul to do the work of the nineteenth century. But He resolved to create me. such as I am, the me by which I am myself, the me by which other people know me, a different me from any that have ever been created hitherto, and from any that will be created hereafter. Unnumbered possible creatures, which God saw when He chose me, He left to remain in their nothingness. They might have worshipped Him a thousand times better than I shall ever worship Him. They might have been higher, holier, and more interesting. But there was some nameless thing about me which He preferred. His love fastened on something special in me. It was just me, with my individual peculiarities, the size, shape, fashion. and way of my particular, single, unmated soul, which in the calmness of His eternal predilection drew Him to create me. I should not believe that God was God, if I did not believe this. This is the profession of faith which each of us should make in our hearts. I cannot tell how men endure life, who do not profess this faith in the Creator's special love.

Moreover, we may go on to say, this speciality never

leaves me. God's preservation of me is in truth a continual new creation. In some respects it is almost more wonderful. and more special, than my original creation. Other men are constantly dying. I am singled out to be kept alive. . Half mankind die before they come to the end of boyhood: I am selected for the maturity of age. Must I not infer then also that, in the sight of God, I stand in some peculiar relation to the whole of His great world? I clearly belong to a plan, and have a place to fill, and a work to do, all which are special; and only my speciality, my particular me, can fill this place or do this work. This is obvious, and yet it is overwhelming also. I almost sink under the weight of the thought. It seems to bring God so very near. Yet, on looking back over my past life, and considering it especially in reference to my present position, I see, that while I have had the most perfect liberty, I have really had very little to do with bringing things about, or settling myself in my present position. It has been done over my head, and outside of me, with exceeding suavity and yet at the same time with exceeding force. I have had very little practical influence over my own destiny. This is one side of the question. But then there is another side to it. If I am to be in a special place in God's plan, and do a special work for Him, and no other place is my place, and no other work is my work, then I have a tremendous power over myself, a power the consequences of which may not only easily be everlasting, but as a matter of fact must positively be everlasting. I come in sight of the most overshadowing responsibilities. Responsibility is the definition of life. It is the inseparable characteristic of my position as a creature. I am constantly moving, constantly acting. I move impulsively, and I work negligently. What then becomes of my special place and of my special work? From this point of view life looks very serious. Surely we must trust God

with a huge confidence, or we shall be frightened into going and burying our talent in the earth!

Now, what is it about us which was the prime object of God's love, when He chose us for creation? It cannot be put into words. It is just all that which makes us ourselves, and distinguishes us from all other selves, whether created or possible. It was precisely our particularity, which God so tenderly and so intensely loved. The sweetness of this thought is almost unbearable. I draw in my breath as if to convince myself that I am alive. I lay my hand on my heart to feel its beating. First I smile, and then I weep. I hardly know what to do with myself, I am so delightfully entangled in the meshes of divine love. This speciality of God's love startles me more and more, the longer I familiarize myself with it. I am obliged to make acts of faith in God, acts of faith in all His different perfections, but the greatest act of faith in this speciality of His love of me, of me such as I am, such as I know myself to be, even such as He knows me to be. Deeper and perpetually deeper, taller and perpetually taller, the shadow of my responsibilities is cast upon me. But it is not a dark shadow, not depressing but inspiring, sobering but not paralysing. I see plainly that my love of God must be as special as God's love of me. I must love Him out of my special place, love Him through my special work: and what is that place, what is that work? Is not this precisely the question of questions? . . .

We have seen the speciality of God's love for us. Now let us look at the spiritual life in the light of this single but all-embracing truth. The view we generally take of it is this. There are multitudes of people, who by the help of the sacraments keep their heads above water, clear themselves of mortal sin, and save their souls, through the amazing compassion of God. In reality, the frequentation

of the sacraments, along with what that frequentation implies, is a spiritual life. For it is a life of grace, not of nature. It could not end in salvation were it otherwise. But we generally use the term spiritual life in a more restricted sense. We mean by it, an aiming at devotion, at the evangelical counsels, or at the perfect interior keeping of the commandments. Of persons so aiming we think that a small number of them have what we call vocations. These vocations are of three sorts. They are either to the ecclesiastical state, or to the religious life, or to some very special life of inward contemplation or of outward philanthropy in the world; and these last we account to be very rare. The remaining vast multitude of spiritual persons have no vocations. They simply remain in the world, sanctifying themselves in their proper place and by their proper work. Certainly, this division expresses a truth, but it expresses it very badly, so badly as to lead us to a false view. The truth is, and it follows from the speciality of God's love of us, every man has a distinct vocation, a vocation of his own, a vocation which may be like other men's vocations, but is never precisely the same. For convenience' sake, we may class people in the spiritual life according to their devotions, or outward position, or peculiar work. But these divisions do not include everything. No two of us are alike. God saw a speciality in us eternally. It was this speciality which He loved. It is this speciality which decides our place and our work in His creation.

Thus, then, we have each of us a vocation of our own. No man or woman on earth has the same. There has never been precisely the same vocation since the world began. It will never be precisely repeated up to the day of doom. No matter what our position in life may be, no matter how ordinary our duties may seem, no matter how commonplace the aspect of our circumstances, we each of us have this

grand secret vocation. We are, in a certain inaccurate and loving sense, necessary to God. He wants us in order to carry out His plans, and nobody else will quite do instead of us. Here is our dignity; here also is our duty. This is the deep fountain of our love; this also is the deep fountain of our fear. Our vocation is as real a vocation, as distinctive a vocation, as the vocation to be a Carmelite, or an Ursuline, a Franciscan, or an Oratorian. It is less visible, less easy to describe. We may be less certain about it, and it is far harder to know. But there it is, a regular and complete vocation. If this is true, all spiritual life is simply working at random, if it is not based either upon the knowledge of this vocation, or upon the endeavour to find it out. That vocation, whatever it is, is God's will about us. He may never intend us to know it fully. But He intends that we should try to find it out. Holiness consists simply of two things, two endeavours, the endeavour to know God's will, and the endeavour to do it when we know it. -"Spiritual Conferences," 377, 378, 380, 381.

XCII

GOD'S VIEW OF THINGS

God is the centre of everything, and the value of everything. As everything comes from Him, so everything returns to Him. Even the rebellious creature, which refuses to repose in the embraces of His love, falls into the hands of His justice. Nothing is worth anything, except in so far as God chooses to have to do with it. The enlightened mind or the loving heart can respect nothing, except under its relation, true or supposed, to Almighty God. There is but one view of things which is true, and

that is God's view of them. It seems hardly worth while to say such very obvious things. Yet the misery is that even Catholics find a difficulty in getting these truths into their minds, to say nothing of the farther difficulty of acting upon them when received. Many men are shocked at the external signs of oblivion of God, which are so distressingly obvious in an heretical country: and yet they themselves in their own subject-matter do not really let God have His own. Look how Catholics act when mixed up with a political party, or a scientific institute, or aristocratical society, and you will see at once a conduct which, implicitly at least, supposes that God is very well in His own place, but that He has limits, and that to intrude Him, and religious considerations which have to do with Him, into certain discussions, actions, or interests, is either an impertinence or a narrow-mindedness, or at least an impatiently tolerated idiosyncrasy. Many good people, from the best of motives, fall into this, and they deem they are going to win God some glory, and His Church some prosperity, from thus playing the sycophant to the world and its principles. Alas! they wake up one day and find that, while their own devotion has become dull, and their prayers distracted, and their piety merely exterior, and their principles insensibly lowered to the level around them, they have not drawn to God one single soul, or in any one nook of the world increased the love of our dear Lord. With how many is this the case, who are thought to be invaluable men and pillars of the Church, not because they are supernatural men and in God's secrets, but because they have the world's ear, and represent its influential classes! Their prudence is apparently successful! But in what does it succeed? Does anybody love Jesus better? Is there a poor soul saved somewhere? Oh no! but the Ministry of the day have been got to

drop a condescending word about the Pope, or a neutral member has asked a question about some little something in the House of Commons; which is first asked, then noticed in the next day's paper, and finally ends in nothing! But, then, anything like unrespectability has been so completely avoided! Well, well! God be praised, and these kind patrons of God be praised also. Only, sometimes we want something more than to be respectable, just as God may possibly want something more than patronage, and perhaps especially not want that. Let us look to our prudence. It will be the best thing about us, if it be supernatural. But not else. In this country, and at this time, men must have a very clear view of God, else they are quite sure in a hundred ways not to let Him have His own.—"All for Jesus," 160-162.

XCIII

OUR GUIDING STAR

How little there was to lead the Kings of the Epiphany, and yet what would they have lost, if they had decided not to follow the star! We may take this star as an illustration to us of the doctrine of vocations and inspirations. Many a star has risen to us in the clear blue light of faith, and we have not followed it. Many a leading light has stood over where the young Child was, as it were beekoning to us with a brightness, in which, modest as it was, we felt there was something heavenly; and yet we have turned away, and have now clean forgotten it. If we could but have hearts to feel, and eyes in our souls to see, where we really are! There are good angels round us, and graces are raining down upon us, great and small, all our

lives long, and inspirations are falling upon us, thick as snow-flakes, and almost as softly and as silently, and we are fastened with a thousand fastenings to great unknown eternal purposes, and we feel them no more than a strong man feels the cobwebs and the gossamer on the autumnal grass; and all the while we are closed all round and walled in, not so much with the sun and moon and stars, with the air and the floor of our own planet, as with the living and inevitable presence of the All-holy, who will not spare us one moment from His sight, and who even while we sleep expects us to do our work of glorifying Him, and whose love of us, and therefore His jealousy of us, is as everlasting as Himself.

But there may be some whose ignorance of their vocation is their own fault, or, if not in any fault at all as yet, who may come to the knowledge of it by using the proper means. A man who does not lead a life of prayer, of course does not lead a life of light; and he who does not dwell in inward light, can neither see God nor understand His ways with us. If, then, we would learn what our special vocation is, or at least make that endeavour to learn it which God expects of us, we must begin by being interior, by attaining that habit of seeing in the dark, to which I have already alluded. God must be watched, in order to be known; and we must watch Him on our knees, and in the lowest place within ourselves to which we can sink. Thus we shall learn much, if we do not learn all. We shall learn enough to give us the opportunity of being much holier, even if we do not learn the precise thing of which we are in quest, namely. our special vocation. Then again, as spiritual direction is almost a necessary condition of self-knowledge, so is it in ordinary cases almost an inevitable condition of the knowledge of God's dealings with our souls. As heavenly apparitions are visible to some of the bystanders, and not to

others, so God's movements in the soul are often manifest to the eyes of others, and hidden from our own. Sometimes there are natural reasons for our not understanding the operations of grace within ourselves, and sometimes there are supernatural reasons for their being invisible to us, or inexplicable. While we must be accurate and punctual in the examination of our conscience, we must also lean on some one else, and be content sometimes, and within certain limits, to see with his eyes and to hear with his ears. If we do not lead interior lives, our whole course may be changed without our knowing it. Sometimes this happens through some little inobservance of our own, which hardly amounts to a fault, and yet is pregnant with consequences. Sometimes new circumstances gather round us, and an invisible hand presses the helm, and our life steers upon a track almost indistinguishably like its old one, yet leading to a very different quarter. Hence, to our own inward vigilance and to our docility to intelligent and disinterested direction, we must add a quiet observation of what happens to us from without, and which is God's external providence over us. A pondering, a grateful, pensive, admiring pondering of past mercies, is a very different thing from that sickly self-inspection which unnerves so many pious persons, and is unwholesome to all. Our past years are a scroll of prophecy, full of rules and intimations for the future. Like the prophet, we must eat the scroll, and eat it often. A spiritual life, arranged independently of our outward circumstances, and alongside of our external duties instead of upon them, is simply a stronghold of delusions.—" Spiritual Conferences," 390-392.

XCIV

THE LIVING PRESENT

THE surest method of arriving at a knowledge of God's eternal purposes about us is to be found in the right use of the present moment. We must esteem our present grace, and rest in it, and with tranquil assiduity correspond to it. Our present grace is the most infallible will of God. It is a revelation from God, which almost always brings its own authoritative interpretation along with it. What we want for our sanctification is not merely grace, but the right grace, the right grace at the right time and in the right place. God's will does not come to us in the whole, but in fragments, and generally in small fragments. It is our business to piece it together, and to live it into one orderly vocation. Like a lantern in the night, grace gives light around our feet, a circle of light just wide enough to prevent our stumbling. But then we must look at our feet. If we strain our eyes into the gloom ahead of us, we shall stumble in spite of the lantern: nay, sometimes we shall even stumble because of it, its shadows move so suddenly, and with such unwieldy strides. Our present grace is also the one least beset with delusions, and we can act safely upon it, although perhaps not comfortably, even when we do not see how it matches with what has just gone before, or how it can fit into any conceivable future which our circumstances will allow. The hours are like slaves which follow each other, bringing fuel to the furnace. Each hour comes with some little faggot of God's will fastened upon ts back. If we thus esteem our present grace, we shall begin to understand God's purposes. It seems an easy thing to do, and yet it cannot really be easy, because so few lo it. One man is always pulling the past to pieces, while

another man is marching with his head erect into the uncertain future, disdainful of the present. Strange to say, intentions are more exciting than actions, and therefore more attractive. For safety and for swiftness, for clear light and successful labour, there is nothing like the present. Practically speaking, the moment that is flying holds more eternity than all our past, and the future holds none at all, and only becomes capable of holding any, as it is manufactured piecemeal into the present.—"Spiritual Conferences," 392, 393.

XCV

OUR PRIVATE REVELATION OF GOD'S LOVE

THE providence of God in the lives of men is to each one in particular a private revelation of His love. The biography of every one of us is to ourselves as luminously supernatural, as palpably full of divine interferences, as if it were a page out of the Old Testament history. Moreover, all that is providential is also merciful. The interferences are all on the side of love. Stern-looking accidents, when they turn their full face to us, beam with the look of love. Even our very faults are so strangely overruled, that mercy can draw materials for its blessings even out of them. It is true we may easily delude ourselves. But the natural tendency to find a meaning in what happens to ourselves, and to exaggerate its significance, cannot altogether, or even nearly, account for the providential aspect which our past lives present to us, when we reflect upon them in the faith and fear of God.

Our merciful Creator seems to have led us very gently, as knowing how weak and ill we are; yet He has led us plainly towards Himself. If it is not speaking of Him too familiarly, He seems to have done everything just at the right time, and in the right place, to have put nothing before us till we were ready for it and could make the most of it, to have timed His grace and apportioned it, so that we might have as little as possible the guilt of resisting grace, to have weighed even our crosses before He laid them upon us, and to have waited an auspicious moment each time He would persuade us to something fresh. He has combined events with the most consummate skill, and brought out the most wonderful results, and they have always been in our favour. There are difficulties and seeming exceptions to the ordinary course of this genial providence. But it is only at first sight that they perplex us. These very exceptions, on closer investigation or longer experience, turn out to be the most striking examples of the general rule of benevolence and love. If we ask each man separately, this is what he will tell us. We have all of us had this private revelation. But are not God's works for the most part remarkable for their efficacy? Do not all these secret biographies of men, with their beautiful disclosures of His assiduous ministering love, bear upon this question of salvation? Has He so waited upon each of us, that we might at any time have mistaken Him for our Guardian Angel, instead of our God; and yet is not His solicitude in far the greater number of cases to have the one issue which His glory so earnestly desires ?-" The Creator and the Creature," 336-338.

XCVI

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In the kingdom of nature there are three vast provinces or separate worlds, which are full of the most exquisite enjoyment to the creature; and we speak only of enjoyments which, if through our frailty they are dangerous as stealing our hearts from God, are yet altogether without reproach of sin. The physical world is full of God's rewards. Life is itself a joy. But what shall we say of the abounding sense of health and vigour, which they who enjoy it the most abundantly can hardly value at its legitimate price? Yet to one whose head is always aching, whose limbs have always in them some lurking pain, and whose languor and feebleness is all day long playing the traitor to the activity of his mind or the energy of his will, the sense of health, when it comes, is almost like a miracle. There is the surpassing beauty of scenery, the grandeur of the mountains, the sublimity of the sea, the variety of fertile landscape, the rain, the wind, the sunshine, and the storm. Every sense is an avenue of perpetual pleasure which, if we will, can raise the mind to God, and inflame our hearts with love. If we except the irregularities which sin has introduced into the physical world, and which manifestly form no part of the system, the whole of it is simple pleasure and enjoyment, an emanation from the everlasting and inexhaustible gladness of the Most High.

But the pleasures of the intellectual world are yet more wonderful. Can any pleasure be more exquisite than the sensible exercise of our mental faculties? The variety, the multitude, the depth, the rapidity, the interweaving of our thoughts, are full of boundless enjoyment, leading us through realms and realms of truth and beauty, and charming us at every turn with some enchanting discovery. Through some minds the pure delight of poetry thrills with feelings of the most indescribable nature. With others the sweet skilful strains of music wind into the uttermost recesses of their souls, with a beauty which is sometimes so gifted as almost to win back the reason that has already deserted its throne. To others form and colour, painting,

statuary, and architecture, are like copious fountains of power and enjoyment streaming into them abundantly for ever. With many the labour of composition is only a pain because of the very excess of the pleasure, which is more than they can bear. The investigation of truth is only at times weary and irksome, because our tyrant minds are demanding of the body what it cannot give. No more can be said of the pleasures of the intellectual world than that they are marvellous shadows of the incomprehensible joys of God Himself.

If the moral world seems to afford a less variety of enjoyment than the intellectual, it far transcends it in the vividness and power of its enjoyments. The will is an inexhaustible mine of joys, which our nature seems to prize beyond all others. Our affections are complicated instruments of the most amazing and unexpected and diversified pleasures, which possess our whole nature and fulfil it with satisfaction in a way which no other pleasures do. Human love sits upon a throne above all other human joys, and there is no one who ever dreams of questioning its rights or of abating its prerogatives. Indeed the joy of love is too great for life. It breaks its bounds, runs riot, and makes wild work even with the strong framework of society and the destiny of kingdoms. It fills every depth in our nature and then runs over, deluging mind and will, duty and even passion. There is no abyss sufficiently capacious to hold the torrents of love, which one heart is able to outpour, except that sea without horizon, bed, or shore, the everblessed Being of God Himself. The Holy Ghost, the eternally proceeding Spirit, is the jubilee of the Father and the Son; and His shadow lies for evermore upon the moral world, and the vast reflecting waters of the human will. As the physical world with its joys of substance and being appears to be a transcript of the Person of the Eternal

Father, and the intellectual world with its light and laws to be an illuminated shadow of the Person of the Word, so does the moral world, the fiery thrilling world of love and will, represent Him who is the coequal limit of the Godhead, the third Person of the Ever-blessed Trinity.

Yet these three worlds, the physical, the intellectual, and the moral, are one world; and in their unions, blendings, borrowings, comparisons, and intersections, we have so many fresh sources of the most delightful enjoyment, above and beyond those which these worlds furnish in their separate capacities. Why, then, do we not worship more constantly and more intelligently in common daily things the wisdom of God, thus lending itself to the strong will of His goodness in every department of creation? Every orb in the immeasurable fields of indistinguishable star-dust lies in the light of God's outpoured and everflowing joy. Every created intelligence drinks its fill of the fountains of His gladness. Every instinct of animals beats with a pulsation of divine enjoyment. Every tree uplifts its head and flings out its branches, every flower blooms and sheds sweet odour, every mineral glances and sparkles, just as the clouds sail, and the waters flow, and the planet turns, in the excess of the happiness of God. His blessedness lies over the whole world, serenely shining, like the waters of a spiritual sea beneath whose transparent depths all creation with beautiful distinctness lies. Thus, in God's wide world there is no room for sin, no provision for sorrow, not a corner for unhappiness. Sin is a stranger, an intruder, an enemy, as little at home on earth as it would be in heaven. It is we who have introduced it into the bright and happy world, we who, by the freedom of our wills, which were left at large that we might love God the more magnificently, have broken down the cloister of His paradise.—" The Creator and the Creature," 241-244.

XCVII

OUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN

THERE is something especially reliable or trustworthy in paternal love. Other love may seem more quickly excited, or more outwardly demonstrative, or less chequered with shades of austerity, or less chastened with fear, or less sparing in its words. But there is something ultimate in a father's love, something that cannot fail, something to be believed against the whole world. We almost attribute practical omnipotence to our father in the days of our childhood. There is always against everybody an appeal to him, whose judgment is infallible, whose decision is certain to be on our side, and who has means of his own to execute his sentences irresistibly. Fire will not burn us, if he is near. The thunderbolts must turn aside, when they see him. The high winds can only rock us to sleep, the rough seas are only laughing at us, and we can have them punished when we will. Nightly terrors disappear in his arms, and even ghosts from the land of death dare not pursue us there. A mother's love, dear as it is, is not a thing like this. This love is a picture of our affectionate dependence on our Heavenly Father; for with Him we are always children, not on this side of the grave only, but on the other also. Heaven is eternal childhood in the mansion. of our Father. Many children, who fear their fathers, will vet take liberties with them which they will not take with their mothers. Their very fears lean upon their father, as completely as their love. Thus, timid and daring at once, we feel so at liberty with our Heavenly Father, that it seems to us, in our weak way of conceiving things, as if we were more at home with Him than with the Word or the Holy Spirit. The Word has to be veiled in flesh that He

may not frighten us with His splendour, and then the Father will take us by the hand and teach us the Word. The Holy Ghost is inexpressibly dear to us; but we are afraid of Him because of the possibility of the unpardonable sin, because of His sharpness with Ananias and Sapphira, and also because we ourselves know something of the sensitiveness and jealousy of His grace. Yet the Son throws His fraternal arms of flesh around us in the embraces of His love; and the Holy Spirit is fain to nestle like a dove in the bosom of our souls. What then must be our feeling of the tenderness of the Father, to whose justice we dare to confide ourselves and our eternity, as placidly as if He could not, if He would, cut off the entail of our eternal inheritance? Words cannot tell what that word says, and sings, and shows, and works, within our souls,—our Heavenly Father.

Indulgence is the grace of justice, and it is something more than mercy. Is indulgence then an Attribute of the unutterably holy God? An indulgence infinitely holy, the indulgence of omnipotence, the indulgence of unspeakable justice, the indulgence of eternal love,—what can be conceived more beautiful, more ravishing? Yet this is the Eternal Father. He, who lives only for Himself, seems to live exclusively for us. He, who is adorably self-sufficient, only finds His sufficiency in the poverties of our love. will merge all His royalties in the single prerogative of His Fatherhood. His length, His breadth, His depth, His height, -all are in His compassionate Paternity. To Himself, as well as to us, His Paternity is enough. He will take no mission. He will fill no office. He will exercise no judgment. "Pater enim non judicat quenquam,"-"the Father judgeth no one" (St. John v. 22). He will only be to us indulgence, reward, repose, a Father, a Bosom, a Home. O Father! of all fathers the most fatherlike! O uncreated tenderness! O plenitude of paternal fondness! O dearest and most blessed Person! so clearly seen yet so adorably invisible, so very near in love yet so far off in majesty! how can we praise Thee but with our silence, how can we love Thee but by the passionate confession of our impossibility to love Thee worthily? Sweet Babe of Bethlehem! show us the Father. It will be enough; for there is no possible more that we can crave. It will not be more than enough; for less will not content our craving. Simply, as St. Philip said, He is enough, the Father is enough!

Our relationship of brothers to Jesus is very sweet, and has an independent sweetness of its own. But it also opens our way deeper for us into the Paternity of the Father. We are more His sons, because we are the brothers of Jesus. He is more our Father on that account. The Sacred Humanity has glorified us all with its own excellent filiation. As in the days of Bethlehem the Father imparted the shadows and rights of His blessed Paternity mysteriously to Mary and Joseph, and thus made the region of the Infancy so glorious and so heaven-like, in like manner now He will not leave us without similar consolations. He imparts them to His priests in their relationship to our souls, and above all in respect to the Blessed Sacrament. It is part of our Father's love that, inside the pale of the Church earth should be one perpetual, and even ubiquitous, Bethlehem. The Infant Jesus, the joy of the Father and our joy. is for ever there, and in Him the Father declared, with rare expletive, that He was well pleased. Still on the altar and in the tabernacle the Babe of Bethlehem is increasing the glory of the Father. Still is He giving breadth and space to His Father's love by the multitude of the redeemed. Still is He furnishing His Father with new opportunities of communicating His Paternity to new children and in new graces. Still is the novelty of the service and the love which the Father received from the Babe of Bethlehem as

new as ever, if not more wonderfully new, upon the altar. Still is every Mass illustrating all the Father's perfections in that work of His predilection, the work of abbreviating His long, eternally spoken, and unbrokenly uttered Word. By the Father's love we live in Bethlehem. Bethlehemite Calvaries we find there, whereon love tenderly crucifies us, sparing more than it punishes, and punishing, not to punish, but that it may more abundantly To the great Calvary we never go. Father laid that only on our Eldest Brother. It is not for such as we are. Our homes are Bethlehem and Nazareth. We have our Desert and our Egypt for seasons; but only the shadow of Calvary. More than the shadow of it our Father cannot bear should fall upon us. How can we say what we feel of this benignity of our Father? We will think of Mary, and yet say that, when a father is indulgent, he is more indulgent than a mother. Little ones treat their mother as the authority of rule, and their father as the authority of dispensation: and mothers are wellpleased their children should use them so, in order that they may thus childishly express the love they bear their fathers, which is all too great for their little words to hold. It is a mother's noblest joy to watch her child increasing in love of its father and in its father's love.—" Bethlehem," 484-488.

XCVIII

OUR FATHER'S TENDERNESS

THERE is no truth more certain than that God is our Father, and that all that is most tender and most gentle in all paternity on earth is but the merest shadow of the boundless sweetness and affectionateness of His paternity in

heaven. The beauty and consolation of this idea surpasses words. It destroys the sense of loneliness in the world. and puts a new colour on chastisement and affliction. calls consolation out of the very sense of weakness, enables us to trust God for the problems we cannot solve, and binds us by a sense of most dear relationship to all our fellow men. The idea enters into and becomes the master thought of even all our spiritual actions. In penance we remember it; in sacraments we taste it; in aiming at perfection we lean upon it; in temptations we feed upon it; in suffering we enjoy it. He is our Father in the ordinary events of life, in protection from a thousand evils which He never lets us feel, in answers to prayer, in blessing those we love, and in forbearance with ourselves, forbearance with a degree of coldness and incorrigibleness which is almost incredible, even to ourselves.

He is our Father not nominally only, but really also. As I said, the tie comes out of creation. The Creator has a marvellous and mysterious sensible love for His creatures, with which no earthly affection can compare for indulgence or for tenderness. Moreover, He has been pleased to make our interests identical with His; and He has so created us in His likeness and image as that we should reflect even His Divine Majesty. But He is our Father also by covenant; and as He ever effects what He promises, this new paternity is as real as the other. But beyond all ties of nature, grace, and glory, by which He calls us children, He is our Father in a way we can never fully know, in that He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Out of this filial feeling towards our Heavenly Father comes ease of conscience as to past sin. We can trust Him, in sweet confidence, even with the unutterable decision of our eternal doom. We enjoy liberty of spirit in indifferent actions, mingled with an intense desire to serve

Him which our filial love inspires. Out of it come also a sweet forgetfulness of self, enjoyment in prayer, patience in doubts, calmness in difficulties, light-heartedness in trials, and an uncomplaining contentment in desolation. We worship Him for His own blessed sake, because He is our most dear Father. Happy sunshine of this thought! it falls upon our souls with triple beam—more trust in God, more freedom with God, more generosity with God.

I have dwelt upon this, because it is of paramount importance that we should be thoroughly imbued with the true spirit of the Gospel; and the missing of it so frequently as men do, is partly owing to their not remembering every hour of the day that our Blessed Lord is God, and partly to their mixing some other idea of God with that of Father, and allowing the harsher element to preponderate.

—"Growth in Holiness," 55-57.

XCIX

THE CHILDREN OF GOD

CHILDHOOD is a time of endless learning. It learns at play, as well as at school. Its lessons hardly teach it more than its idleness. It observes without knowing that it observes, and imitates without suspecting that it is not original. It is the strangest mixture of the restless and the passive, always moving yet always brooding also. There are few men who will ever in after-life be half so contemplative as they were amidst the changeful and capricious activities of childhood.

There are many harvests in a lifetime, but there is only one seed-time; and all the crops are sown in seeming confusion at once, yet come up in an orderly succession which betokens law, not uninfluenced by circumstances. After-

life is the theatre on which childhood produces its spectacles one after another, like so many dramas, whose lightness or sadness, beauty or harshness, tell recognizable tales of birthplace and its scenery, of early schools with their dark and bright, of the impress of a father's mind, or the moulding of a mother's skilful love, of the grave touches of a brother's affectionate influence, or the ineffaceable memories of an idolatrous sister's touching partisanship. But, as life goes on, it is above all things the father's influence which manifests itself more and more. The voice takes his tone, the gait his peculiarity. Many little ways unconsciously develop themselves, which have never been remarked in past years, and can now be hardly an intentional imitation of one who has been in his grave for a quarter of a century. The old family home is renewed, and they that remember old times look on with smiles and tears, both of which are at once painful and pleasant, because they raise the dead, and put new life and colour into memories that were fading away in grey time.

Now, all this may be applied to the subject of religion. What childhood is to after-life, so far as this world is concerned, this life is to the life to come. We are always learning, and learning more than we suspect. If we are earnestly striving to serve God, we are observing Him when we do not think of it. Our likeness to Him is growing, like a family likeness in a child, sleeping or waking; and its progress is hardly noted.

We are conscious of it only at intervals. Our nature is becoming secretly and painlessly supernaturalized, even at moments when the painful efforts of mortification may happen to be comparatively suspended. God's ways are passing into ours, though for the present it is all under the surface; and not unfrequently appearances are even the other way. Sometimes, as we advance in the spiritual life,

we are taken by surprise at finding how much more deeply heavenly principles have sunk into us than we had supposed, and how, almost intuitively, we put ourselves on God's side, take His view of things, and even in a far-off way imitate what we may reverently term His style of action. Long daily intimacy with our Heavenly Father is beginning to tell upon us. Habits of childlike reverence are almost implicitly habits of filial imitation. Great results follow even on this side the grave; but surely much greater ones will follow on the other. The degree of our likeness to God there may depend more than we suppose on the secret undergrowth of that likeness here. As childhood's best harvests are those which come latest in life, so may it be that our imitation of God may not merely secure our bliss hereafter, but may give a character to our blessedness, and exercise no little influence over it for ever.—" Bethlehem." 103-105.

C

GOD, OUR FRIEND

God is our Friend. It requires an act of faith, and not a little act, to say so. But so it is; the Infinite, the Omnipotent, the All-holy is our bosom-friend. We doubt if any human friendship ever really lasted the whole of two mutual lives. Few men are habitually sincere, even with the few whom they love extremely. Fewer still trust their friends with a perfectly confiding trust. Nay, friendship shows itself in a morbid readiness to take offence, in petty diplomacies to find out if injurious suspicions are true, in proud silences which will not ask for explanations, or in childish breaches made for the childish excitement of reconciliations. The truth is, friendship is a romance, that has

been written and spoken a thousand times among men, but seldom acted, unless in a dramatic way. Thus we pray proverbially to be saved from our friends, and we say that a man who has many acquaintances, and few friends, is at once the happiest and the safest of mankind. There have hardly been a dozen friendships since the time of Jonathan and David, which could bear the weight of an awkwardlooking circumstance, or a decently attested report. And friendship at its height, in the fervour of its fever-fit, what is it but a tyranny? Our friends think themselves gods, not men, and us their instruments, the profitable implements of their pleasure, their ambition, and their will. Friendship is not consecrated by a sacrament as marriage is. Nevertheless we must have a friend. We shrink from unbefriended solitude. Yet there is no real friend but God. He is in His own world almost the solitary example of the beauty of fidelity. See what a friend He is! He acts as if He thinks better of us than we think even of ourselves. He can suspect nothing; for He is God. He forgives offences as fast as we commit them, and appears to forget as soon as He has forgiven. His love is always as fresh to us as it was at the beginning. He keeps plighting His friendship with us by presents, whose exuberant variety never tires, while their magnificence and exceeding price outstrip the fondest expectation, and the grace with which they are conferred removes from the sense of obligation all the feeling of oppression, and conduces rather to the equal familiarity of love. Whenever we will we can be friends with God, and He gives Himself up to His friends with such a romantic exclusiveness, that we feel as if He belonged to us alone, and that all of Him was ours.—"The Creator and the Creature," 185, 186:

CI

THE SPOUSE OF GOD

THERE is still another tie which binds us fast to God. It is the end of that whereof creation was the beginning; it is the consummation of God's eternal choice. It is the marriage of our souls with Him. We are His spouses, as well as His creatures and His elect. Indeed we are His spouses, because we are His creatures and His elect. But how can we tell wherein the peculiarity of that intimate union consists? When the saints are betrothed to God, it is by operations of grace so magnificent, by supernatural mysteries so transcendent, that the language in which they are related seems unreal and inflated; and if such be the Espousals on earth, what will the Marriage be in heaven? Oh! who shall dare to picture the interior caresses which the soul receives from Him who loved it eternally, and chose it out of nothing in a rapture of creative love? Who shall dare to fasten in ungainly human words the sort of inexpressible equality with God which the soul enjoys, or her unspeakable community of goods with Him? And wherefore does He use the word spouse, but to express this glorious unity? Marriage was made a figure of the unity of God, and a shadow of Christ's union with His Church. Its love was to supersede all other ties. It was to obliterate the father's and the mother's home from the young wife's heart. It was to ride conqueror over the fond mother's idolatry for her firstborn. Yet all this is the faintest of shadows, the feeblest of figures, to set forth the union of the soul with God. How shall we love Him as we ought? Rather the question should be, Can we love Him at all with anything worthy of the name of love? May we even try to love Him who has loved us with such an overwhelming love? Must not our only love be speechless fear? No! for it is the law of all creation, the beautiful, benignant law, the unexpected, the incredible commandment,—Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole soul, with thy whole heart, with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength!—"The Creator and the Creature," 188, 189.

CII

"PLENTIFUL REDEMPTION"

LOOK at the Precious Blood for a moment as it lies within the Sacred Heart with a living peace, like the restless tranquillity of ocean. It is itself the ocean of joy from which all other joys in creation come. It is through it that the immensity of God's gladness pours itself into all the universe, and at the same time lets itself also be mysteriously gladdened by the Precious Blood. All the joys, and they are numberless, which are still left in the fallen world, whether they be natural or supernatural, are in substance Indulgences, Indulgences which are granted because of the Precious Blood. Sinners upon earth still have joys: they come from the Precious Blood. Saints on earth are the gladdest of God's creatures. Their lives are all flight and song, like the hot-blooded lives of the birds of the air. 'All this gladness is from the Precious Blood. The saints in heaven are spirits overflowed with joy, spirits whose quietness is transport and whose soberness is ecstasy. It is the Precious Blood which flows over them for ever. The wide, outspread vastness of angelic jubilee, the thing likest to immensity of all created things, created to mirror the immensity of God, is all an emanation from the Precious Blood. Nay, it is a changeful, changeless sea, with tides; for there

are daily, hourly increases of new joys in the angels from the conversion of sinners; and these conversions are precisely the operations of the Precious Blood. Yet that ocean of angelic jubilee washes but the base of Mary's throne. Her joy is like the fringe of the blessedness of God. It is all the multitudinous joys of creatures made one joy by her Divine Maternity, and multiplied, as well as intensified, by being one. Yet the bliss of Mary is all from the Precious Blood, the nearest gladness to the gladness of the Sacred Humanity, the first heart filled from the Sacred Heart. But who shall tell the nameless, immeasurable joys, with which the Precious Blood fills the Sacred Heart itself? It cannot contain its own jubilee. It multiplies itself in order to relieve its exultation. It has inundated heaven; but the vast shores of the Empyrean confine it and restrain its floods. By the help of its omnipotence, behold! it escapes as if by miracle, sparkles in countless daily chalices upon earth, and within the cup of each chalice it peacefully outstretches itself, unhindered in its infinity, with its grandeur enfranchised, and its love set free from all material laws. But the jubilee of the Precious Blood lies onward still and onward, whither we cannot explore it. We listen to hear its breakers sounding on the misty shore. But there comes no sound. The shores are too far off; or are there shores at all? The Word delights eternally in His Human Blood. Its golden glow beautifies the fires of the Holy Ghost. Its ministries beget inexplicable joys in the Unbegotten Father.

I was upon the seashore; and my heart filled with love it knew not why. Its happiness went out over the wide waters and upon the unfettered wind, and swelled up into the free dome of blue sky until it filled it. The dawn lighted up the faces of the ivory cliffs, which the sun and sea had been blanching for centuries of God's unchanging love. The miles of noiseless sands seemed vast, as if they

were the floor of eternity. Somehow the daybreak was like eternity. The idea came over me of that feeling of acceptance, which so entrances the soul just judged and just admitted into heaven. To be saved! I said to myself, To be saved! Then the thoughts of all the things implied in salvation came in one thought upon me; and I said, This is the one grand joy of life; and I clapped my hands like a child, and spoke to God aloud. But then there came many thoughts all in one thought, about the nature and manner of our salvation. To be saved with such a salvation! This was a grander joy, the second grand joy of life: and I tried to say some lines of a hymn; but the words were choked in my throat. The ebb was sucking the sea down over the sand quite silently; and the cliffs were whiter, and more daylike. Then there came many more thoughts all in one thought; and I stood still without intending it. To be saved by such a Saviour! This was the grandest joy of all, the third grand joy of life; and it swallowed up the other joys; and after it there could be on earth no higher joy. I said nothing; but I looked at the sinking sea as it reddened in the morning. Its great heart was throbbing in the calm; and methought I saw the Precious Blood of Jesus in heaven throbbing that hour with real human love of me.- "The Precious Blood," 193-195.

CHI

THE CITY OF GOD

THE Upper Room of Pentecost is another Bethlehem. It is the birthplace of the Church. There is the same Mother as in the midnight cave. But, instead of Joseph, there are apostles. Instead of angels' songs in the quiet midnight,

there is the rushing wind of the Eternal Spirit; and His fiery tongues instead of the wintry brightness of the stars. From that Upper Room the Procession seems to start again. Not that the Precious Blood had left the earth, even at the Ascension. The whole of those ten days it lay, in real sacramental presence unconsumed, on Mary's immaculate heart as on a reposoir. But it is not our present purpose to dwell upon the analogies between Bethlehem and the Room of Pentecost. We must still follow our Procession. From the day of Pentecost we can see its course onward for ages. The scenery of history is more varied than even that of geography. It has its bleak mountains and its cultivated lands, its valleys and its plains, its forests and even its deserts, its cities and its solitudes, its beautiful maritime borders and its grey expanses of melancholy wold. Across all this various scenery the Procession of the Precious Blood moves on, sometimes a single pomp, sometimes multiplied into many pomps, then again reuniting in one, or again sending forth a branch which shines for many a league and then disappears gradually or at once, as if the earth had drunk it up, as the sands drink the rivers of the desert. Still its course is plainly onward, from the east to the west; and its metropolis is changed, from Jerusalem to Rome. Its pageantry is more magnificent than ever. The choirs of angels still attend it; but its sacred vessels are borne by a resplendent human hierarchy, which is a copy of the hierarchies of heaven, and an emanation of the eternal priesthood of Jesus. At its head moves the never-dying Peter, the prince of the apostles and the vicar of his Lord, while by his side moves evermore the glorious St. Michael, the captain of the hosts of God and the famous zealot of His honour. So multiplied are the symbols and the blazonries of Mary, that we might sometimes take it for a procession of our Lady. But then again, from its more solemn pomp and more austere observance, we perceive that it is in truth a Procession of the Blessed Sacrament. Above it all, in a glory of sweetest light, hovers the Eternal Dove, who has come to be to the Church what Jesus was to His disciples during the Three-and-Thirty Years. Beautiful Spirit! He has clothed the Procession with His beauty. He has shed over it the whiteness of His holiness. He, who fashioned the Sacred Humanity after His own model of Mary's loveliness, has imprinted the thousand-fold expression of the likeness of Jesus upon the Church. So the Procession moves on, bearing on high the strange heaven-invented vessels of the Sacraments, and attended with this amazing equipage.

It fits all times. It harmonizes with all scenery. Its bravery does not flaunt the twilight of the catacombs, while it is in equal keeping with imperial courts. It illuminates ages which else were dark, and the eye rests reposefully upon its placid glories, when false glitter all around at once deludes and fatigues the sight. With appropriate magnificence it adorns institutions venerable for their long antiquity, while with equal fitness it inaugurates the unprecedented novelties of daring epochs, as calmly as if it had been used to them for centuries. In the desert of the Thebais and amidst the temples of Athens, in the white squares of Iconium and by the thousand runlets of Damascus, amidst the swamps of Bulgaria and the mosques of Granada, in the oak sanctuaries of Scandinavia or the colleges of Paris, in the market-places of the Flemish towns or by the missionary rivers of La Plata, it is at once the light of the supernatural ennobling nature, and at the same time a beauty which seems as natural as the grey ruin which an aged wood so well knows how to incorporate with its quiet self. We have seen all this; for the light of history falls clearly upon it.—" The Precious Blood," 158-160.

CIV

DEVOTION TO THE CHURCH

WHAT astronomy, and geology, and chemistry, and other cognate sciences, and what politics, statistics, metaphysics, and their congenial sciences, are to many men and to most men, the Church is to us. It is our devotion, our pursuit, our passion. It is our favourite science, our chosen study, our life's enthusiasm. As a matter of taste no one can blame us; for tastes are facts, and facts which are mostly inculpable, and hardly admit of criticism. One man has as much right to be immensely interested in a Sacrament, as another in a curious dip of strata, or the varying magnitude of a perplexing star, or in some new property of a metalloid, or in the dethroning of an old element by dividing it. If one man may without blame make all other sciences, literatures, and pursuits subordinate to his one science, literature, and pursuit, another may make all sciences, literatures, and pursuits, subordinate to his exclusive devotion to the Church. This is putting devotion to the Church upon its lowest ground. It is well sometimes to remember lowest grounds for things. Important rights are often founded in them. Not unfrequently the essences of things lie hidden in them. They ought not therefore to be abandoned or despised. To me, then, the Church is what the starry skies are to the astronomer. I know there are other things in creation besides the Church; but I am only very partially interested in them. Practically, to me the world means the Church. For the only interest I can take in the world outside the Church arises from the fact that the Church must be affected by its movements. I delight in all progresses of science, because they are an addition to the science of

theology. I sympathize ardently with all social progresses, because they are at once, whether as difficulties or as facilities. questions of soul-saving. The revelations of statistics form a sort of handbook for Catholic charity. Psychology illustrates the Sacraments. Political changes interest me: for they all act upon the wonderful fortunes of the Holy See, and are mostly for its ultimate advancement. All real widening of men's minds by education, or literature, or art, is an effacing of prejudices against the Church, and facilitates conversion. In almost every department of knowledge, the world, as it advances, keeps answering its own objections to religion; and this is both grateful and interesting. All that is wide, deep, forward, active, trustful, is most congenial with the spirit of the Church. Even the grand old science of history has taken to discovery; and its discoveries, one after the other, are so many reparations to the Church. The Church is my centre. I look at all things as revolving round it; and my interest in them is proportioned to their action upon it. The Church is my science, my taste, my interest, and my attraction. I do not sneer at the devotion of the astronomer, and he must not sneer at mine. I tolerate the metaphysician and he must tolerate me. I have neither fears, suspicions, nor jealousies of his philosophy; he must have none of my theology.

But, in reality, devotion to the Church may rest upon higher grounds than these. In my own mind it rests upon this, -and I say it with all reverence, -that it is God's own devotion. It is God's creation within His own creation, a creation called into being with a speciality of love, created with the miraculous toil and human Bloodshedding of the Omnipotent. It is His own life, His own created life, in creation. Its history is His biography upon earth. Its form is the abiding of His Incarnation amongst men. It is thus for ever repeating His Three-and-Thirty Years.

not that He does not love the whole world, and the most outlying souls in the world, with a strange surpassing love. On the contrary, it is for the very sake of the world that He loves the Church with a better love. If His almighty wisdom saw fit to overwhelm our liberty with its constraints, its first act would be to turn the whole world into the Church, making the Church and the world one and the same thing. The world is His creation as Creator: and our wretchedness did not find its prodigality of love sufficient. The Church is His creation as Redeemer; and it lies in furnaces of divine love heated seven times hotter than the furnaces of creation. Thus the Church is His devotion, His complacency. He loves it with a special, an electing love. This is the true ground of our devotion to the Church. It is God's own devotion. It is His choicest way of loving us.

It is our choicest way of loving Him.

But let us think of this, both more in detail and more at large. As a place the Church is a creation within creation. the royal residence of the Creator-King. To its privileged jurisdiction is granted the full royalty of the whole world. Its laws are holiness. Its atmosphere is grace. Its forms are copies of divine things. Its nature is transfigured with supernatural energies. Its solemnities are celestial mysteries. It is a life, and a giving of life. But it is not only a divine copy of divine things. It contains divine things, and lives by them. In peculiar ways of its own it contains the Divine Persons. Thus its life is not a mere likeness of God, though it is a likeness of Him. But, when faith looks upon His likeness, it sees a further vision. The tabernacles of the Church blossom as with light; the lineaments of the Church fade as in a glorious conflagration, obliterated by the intensity of splendour; and behold! it is Jesus Himself. God and Man, within whose life we have been living: and the glory had been so gentle that we perished not! The

mystery of the Blessed Sacrament is the truth of the life of the Church. We can see and revere the magnificence of the Church. But we shall know the Church better, and appreciate it more truly, when we have seen God. We shall perceive then, that the Church was even more full of divine mysteries than we supposed it was. This is the case with all created things. We must see the Creator, in order to understand the plenitude of their beauty. But it will be more especially so with the Church, because of its special dignity in creation. We see the mountains mirrored in the lake with exquisite distinctness. But when we have looked up to the mountains themselves, and learned them in themselves, the images in the lake are more charming, more distinct, more evidently like, more fascinatingly like, than they seemed to be before. To the eye of God the Church must look most wonderful. It is the work of art on which all the adorable incredibilities of redemption have been expended. Every attribute has tried its handicraft upon it. It expresses the secrets of the Incomprehensible, the yearnings of the Ever-blessed, the desires of the Eternal. It is draped with the golden magnificence of everlasting decrees. The beauty of the divine mind is suffused around it like an impalpable atmosphere of loveliness. Once He saw the woods, and the mountains, and the lakes, and the foaming rivers, and the flowery plains, which He had made, and He remained outside them, and gave them His paternal benediction. But, when He had created the Church, not of earth and of His word, but of His Blood and breath, its fair beauty so won upon Him, that He came into it, and multiplied Himself, and hid Himself in her tabernacles, as the birds hide themselves within the mighty woods.

This is the simple account of the Church, the chief thing to be said of it, but not the only thing. It mirrors the hierarchies of the angels as well as the magnificence of God. It not only imitates their orders and operations, but it supplies them with new ministries, and is every day enlivening them with fresh joys. Its life is bound up with theirs, and its children mingle with them, and become members of their choirs. As to men, it initiates them into a divine citizenship. It explains their destinies. It ennobles their disabilities. It anticipates their glory. It gives a value to their sorrows, and a significance to their joys. It emancipates them from their own littleness, and it conveys to them God's forgiveness of their sins. It puts them to dwell in the suburbs of heaven, even while they are still being tried on earth. As a power the Church has been the most unearthly, the most remarkable, the most successful upon earth. It has no parallel and no analogy. It is a problem which neither historical, nor political, nor philosophical solutions satisfy. It has a history of peculiar interest, and of the most extraordinary variety. In duration its chronicles surpass those of the most ancient monarchy. The records of revolutions are less various, while the history of a single town is less consistent. In the romance of vicissitudes and in dramatic changes no history is to be compared to it. In our own times it is leading a very peculiar life under entirely novel circumstances; and in the midst of universal fluctuation and distrust it is a monument of self-confident tranquillity. It is certain of ultimate conquest, and equally certain of present suffering. Its power and its spirit are felt in the most retired sanctuaries of the private life of a hundred bloods and nations. Yet all this is without sound and without effort. While it is as solid as adamant, it is as pervasive as the air. Who ever saw anything earthly like it? Moreover, it is the only institution of time which will be prolonged into eternity. The grandest monarchies of earth will cast no shadow in heaven. Dumbness and oblivion will pass upon all philosophies. Not a single literature has any eternal meaning. The most magnificent civilization represents nothing on the other side of the grave. The most glorious revolutions have only a temporal significance. The fortunes of the whole earth will leave no impression, will transfer no lines, upon eternity, further than as they may have helped or hindered the salvation of this or that individual soul: whereas the grandeur of the Church on earth is but a prelude to its grandeur up in heaven.

It is no wonder, then, that the Church should lay such a singular grasp on our affections and our lovalty. On the lowest grounds it may rank with astronomy, or psychology, or politics, as the devotion of a life: only that the exclusiveness of the devotion, which in the case of those sectional sciences is a narrowness and a defect, is here a devotedness rather than an exclusiveness; because that which is universal cannot be exclusive. Devotion to the Church combines all interests. It takes in every duty. It provides for every responsibility. It intensifies every love. It embraces all social life, and ennobles it by its embrace. It penetrates all private life, and sanctifies it by its penetration. It is the unity of all knowledge and the harmony of all philosophy. It is interested in all diplomacies, and it survives them all. Its minuteness allows nothing to be overlooked, while its comprehensiveness includes everything within its influence. In a word, the Church is that part of everything, that side of everything, that view of everything, that interference with everything, which represents the double sovereignty and jurisdiction of the Creator and the Redeemer. . .

It is difficult to make pictures of spiritual things. But it brings wonderful thoughts into our minds, and vast indescribable images, if we try to picture the Church to ourselves as outstretching itself to enclose all the Attributes of the Most High, one while rising to each of them, like the arms of the great sea flung upward to the moon, and offering to each the incense of a peculiar devotion, and then another while lying passive while they descend upon it, and leave upon it nameless signs of their mysterious contact. The depths of the Church, like the depths of ocean, are fields of wild flowery loveliness, strangely lighted by the sun through the translucent waters; and thither the glory of God descends, at twilight as He came to Adam, or at midnight as He came to Mary, or in the morning as He came to Israel in the wilderness, to pasture the beautiful flock of His perfections. The Church—it is the fairest of her splendours—is the mother of her Maker's glory.—"The Precious Blood," 251-256, 264, 265.

CV

DEVOTION TO THE POPE

THE Sovereign Pontiff is a third visible presence of Jesus amongst us, of a higher order, of a deeper significance, of a more immediate importance, of a more exacting nature, than His presence in the Poor and in the Children. The Pope is the Vicar of Jesus on earth, and enjoys among the monarchs of the world all the rights and sovereignties of the Sacred Humanity of Jesus. No crown can be above his crown. By divine right he can be subject to none. All subjection is a violence, and a persecution. He is a monarch by the very force of his office; for of all kings he is the nighest to the King of kings. He is the visible shadow cast by the Invisible Head of the Church in the Blessed Sacrament. His office is an institution emanating from the same depth of the Sacred Heart, out of which we have already seen the Blessed Sacrament, and the elevation of the Poor and of Children, take their rise. It is a manifestation

of the same love, an exposition of the same principle. With what carefulness, then, with what reverence, with what exceeding loyalty, ought we not to correspond to so magnificent a grace, to so marvellous a love, as this which our dearest Saviour has shown us in His choice and institution of His earthly Vicar! Peter lives always, because the Three-and-Thirty Years are always going on. The two truths belong to each other. The Pope is to us in all our conduct what the Blessed Sacrament is to us in all our adoration. The mystery of His Vicariate is akin to the mystery of the Blessed Sacrament. The two mysteries are intertwined.

The conclusion to be drawn from all this is of the most momentous importance. It is no less than this - that devotion to the Pope is an essential part of all Christian piety. It is not a matter which stands apart from the spiritual life, as if the Papacy were only the politics of the Church, an institution belonging to her external life, a divinely appointed convenience of ecclesiastical government. It is a doctrine and a devotion. It is an integral part of our Blessed Lord's own plan. He is in the Pope in a still higher way than He is in the Poor or in Children. What is done to the Pope, for him or against him, is done to Jesus Himself. All that is kingly, all that is priestly, in our dearest Lord is gathered up in the person of His Vicar, to receive our homage and our veneration. A man might as well try to be a good Christian without devotion to our Lady, as without devotion to the Pope; and for the same reason in both cases. Both His Mother and His Vicar are parts of our Lord's Gospel.-" Devotion to the Pope," 16-18.

CVI

THE SACRAMENTS

IF an angel were to bear us from this globe which we inhabit, and carry us to some distant star, which God may have adorned as a dwelling-place for some other species of reasonable creatures, we should be struck with the novelty and peculiarity of the scenery around us. Some of its features might remind us of the scenery of earth, although with characteristic differences; while other features would be entirely new, entirely unlike anything we had ever seen before, either in colour, form, or composition. This is very much the effect produced upon us when we come to learn the Catholic doctrine about the Sacraments introduces us into a new world. It gives us new ideas. is more than a discovery; for it amounts to a revelation. The Sacraments are part of the new world introduced into creation by the Incarnation of the Eternal Word; and therefore are an essential part of creation as it was eternally pre-ordained by God. Yet they are quite distinct from any other province in creation. The Sacraments of the Old Law were but shadows of the Sacraments of the Gospel. The Sacraments of the New Law are created things which have been devised and fabricated by our Blessed Lord Himself. The Eucharist was foreshadowed by the Paschal Lamb: the Sacrament of Order by the consecration of priests; and Penance by the legal purifications of the tabernacle. There was no shadow of Confirmation, because it is the Sacrament of the fulness of grace, and so can belong only to the gospel dispensation. Neither was there any shadow of Extreme Unction, because it is the immediate preparation for the entrance of the soul into glory; and there was no entrance into glory for any human soul till Jesus had risen and ascended. Neither could Matrimony be a Sacrament under the Old Law, because the Word had not yet actually wedded our human nature; and the sacramentality of Marriage consists in its being the figure of those transcendent nuptials of the Sacred Humanity.

What then shall we call these Sacraments? They are not persons, yet they seem to be scarcely things: I mean that they seem to be something more than things. We want another word for them, another name, and cannot find one. They are powers, lives, shrines, marvels, divine hiding-places, centres of heavenly power, supernatural magnificences, engraftings of heaven upon earth, fountains of grace, mysterious efficacies, marriages of matter and spirit, beautiful complications of God and man. Each Sacrament is a species by itself. Each has some speciality, which is at once its excellence and its mystery. The preeminence of Baptism consists in its remission of original sin and of the pains due to it. The pre-eminence of Confirmation resides in the vastness of the succours of actual grace which it brings with it, as we see in the fortitude which it conferred upon the Apostles, and which the Eucharist had not conferred. The Sacrament of Penance can claim the privilege of being the most necessary of all Sacraments to those who have been baptized, and of the capability of reiterated remission of mortal sin, which Baptism cannot claim. Extreme Unction excels Penance in the greater copiousness of its graces. The excellence of Order consists in its placing men in the singularly sublime state of being domestic ministers of Christ. Matrimony has a glory of its own in its signification of the union of our Lord with the Church. The pre-eminence of the Eucharist resides, as St. Thomas says, in the very substance of the Sacrament, seeing that it is as it were the Sacrament of all the other Sacraments, the centre of them, the cause of them, the end of them, and the harmony of them. All are because of it, and are subordinate to its amazing supremacy. . . .

Now look out upon the great labouring world, the world of human actions and endurances. It is not possible to measure the influence which is being exercised upon the world at this moment by the Sacraments. They are penetrating the great mass of mankind like the network of veins and arteries in a living body. They are being the causes of millions of actions, and they are hindering the consequences of millions of other actions. They are weaving good, and unweaving evil, incessantly. The roots of great events, which grow up and tower in history, are perhaps fixed in some secret Sacrament or other. The silent and orderly revolutions of the Church are often moulded in them. Society would hardly credit to what an extent it is held together by them. The influence of a single reception of a Sacrament may be handed down for generations; and the making of the destinies of thousands may be in its hands. At this instant by far the greatest amount of earth's intercourse with heaven is carried on, directly or indirectly, through the Sacraments. There is a vast wild world of sorrow upon earth. But over great regions of it the Sacraments are distilling dews of heavenly peace. In the underground scenery of hidden hearts they are at work, turning wells of bitterness into springs of freshness and of life. They are drying the widow's tears, raising up unexpected benefactors for the orphan, nerving the pusillanimous, softening the desperate, rousing the torpid, crowning those who strive, and doing all things for those who die. As the animals came trooping to Adam to be named, so mortal sorrows are coming in herds at all hours to the Sacraments to receive the blessing of the second Adam. Somewhere or other at this moment a Communion may be giving a vocation to some vouthful apostle, who in after

years shall carry the Gospel to populous tribes in the Asian uplands, or throughout the newly-opened river system of neglected Africa. Crowds in heaven shall owe their endless bliss to that one Communion.

But the world of human joys is not much less vast than the world of human sorrows; and the Sacraments are there also, purifying, elevating, sanctifying, multiplying, supernaturalizing multitudes of these blameless delights. Yet there is a difference between their action upon sorrows and their action upon joys. They make no sorrows. They cause no mourning. They create no darkness. Whereas they are for ever creating gladnesses. Splendours flash from them as they move, and their splendours are all jubilees. They are fountains of happiness to all the earth. They cover even the monotonous sands of life with verdure, and make the desert bloom, and crown the hard rocks with flowers, and beautify with their softness the sternest solitudes. Who can tell what songs of human goodness are being sung this hour in the ear of God, because of the joyous inspirations of the Sacraments? Of a truth human joy is a beautiful thing, a very worship of the Creator. Out of Himself there is no beauty like it, unless it be the jubilee of angels. But the joys which the Sacraments have sanctified, and still more, the joys which the Sacraments have gendered, who can tell how sweet they are to the complacency of our Heavenly Father?

It is to be thought of also how the Sacraments embrace and compass human life in their mysterious number seven. Man's life is a pathetic thing. There is no dulness in any biography of earth. Each life has many turns. Within the soul common vicissitudes are not without romance. Supernatural things greatly increase the romance of life. Even calmness and uniformity are like sunset skies, full of noiseless plays of light, and scarce perceptible shiftings of

gold-red clouds, which change the splendour we know not how. Yet is there in all human lives a like recurrence of like vicissitudes. It is this which blends them into one, although they are so various. It is like the burden of the song, which chimes in with equal fitness whether the verse be one of gladness or of sorrow. The things that are common to all men are more touching than those which happen only to some. They are fountains of deeper feeling. They are more touching because they are more natural. They are diviner visitations, because they are more general. It is these things upon which the Sacraments fasten with their instincts of love. The times, the vocations, the states, the crisis of human life, these are all clasped together by the sevenfold band of Sacraments. If we think of all these things we shall own that it is no exaggeration to say that their mere existence makes all creation different from what it would have been without them .- "The Precious Blood," 105-107, 119-121.

CVII

LOVE GREATER THAN THE SACRAMENTS

What is the Church but God's way of rendering the blessings of His Incarnation omnipresent and everlasting? What is the Baptism of Infants but a securing prematurely, and as it were against all reason, the eternal love of their unconscious souls? What is Confession, but mercy made common, justice almost eluded, the most made out of the least? These are human words, but they express something true. What is the sacrament of Confirmation but an act of jealousy, lest the world should steal from God what He had already got? What is the sacrament of Matrimony, but a taking of the stuff and substance of human life, its

common sorrows and joys, its daily smiles and tears, the wear and tear of its rough and smooth, and elevating it all by a sort of heavenly transfiguration into a ceaseless fountain of supernatural and meritorious love? What is Extreme Unction, but an expression of affectionate nervousness, if we may so speak, of our dearest Lord, lest we should fail him just at the last, when so many risks are run? What is the sacrament of Order, but systematizing and ensuring a succession of daily miracles, such as consecrations, absolutions, exorcisms, and benedictions, each one of which is to create, and then to fertilize, and then to beautify, a little world of love for Him? Ask the Divine Solitary of the tabernacle why He lives His hermit life amongst us, and what could His answer be but this-I wait, to show love and to receive it? But wide as He has made the ample bosom of His Church, and though He has multiplied with a commonness, which almost injures reverence, the potent sacraments, this is not enough. None must slip through, if He can but help it. None must be lost except in His despite. There must be something still left, which needs no priest, something as wide as air and as free, which men may have when they cannot have, or at the needful moment cannot find, the sacraments of His own loving institution.

One thing there is, and one only, and we are not surely now surprised to find that one thing,—love. If need be, love can baptize without water, can confirm without chrism, can absolve without ordination, can almost communicate without a Host. For, great as are the sacraments, love is a higher emanation of that priesthood which is for ever according to the order of Melchisedech. How shall we read these riddles, if they may not mean that God so desires our love, that He almost tires our attention and outstrips our imagination by the novelty and profusion of His merciful

desires to secure this marvellously priceless treasure, the puny love of finite hearts?—"The Creator and the Creature," 122-124.

CVIII

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

ONE of the most divine and striking characteristics of the Catholic religion is the Communion of Saints, the way in which everything belongs to everybody, and nobody has any spiritual property of his own. The merits and satisfactions of our dear Lord, the joys and woes of Mary, the patience of the martyrs, the perseverance of confessors, and the purity of virgins, they all belong to all of us. Just as the blood circulates from and to the heart all over the body, so in the Church there is no division or separation. Heaven, Purgatory, and earth, it is all one body. We interchange our merits, we circulate our prayers, we pass on our joys, we infect with our troubles, we use each other's satisfactions as they come to hand. We have all sorts of relations with heaven, and we know exactly how to manage them. As to Purgatory, we have a regular science, and endless practical methods for it, and we are quite at home in them: while on earth kith and kin, blood and country, Jew, Greek, Scythian, bond and free, it is all one. This is what strikes heretics as so very portentous about us; there is no other word than portentous for it. We talk of the other world, as if it was a city we were familiar with from long residence; just as we might talk of Paris, Brussels, or Berlin. We are not stopped by death. Sight is nothing to us; we go beyond it as calmly as possible. We are not separated from our dead. We know the saints a great deal better than if we had lived

with them upon earth. We talk to the angels in their different choirs, as if they were, as they are, our brothers in Christ. We use beads, medals, crucifixes, holy water, indulgences, sacraments, sacrifices, for all this, as naturally as pen, ink, and paper, or axe and saw, or spade and rake. for our earthly work. We have no sort of distrust about the matter. We are all one household, and there is an end of it. The Blessed Lord God is our Father: His dear majesty is our affair; our Elder Brother created us. and has our own nature; Mary is our Mother; the angels and the saints are all the kindest and most familiar of brothers; so we go up and down stairs, in and out, and to each other's rooms, just as it may be; there is no constraint about it at all; the air of the place is simply an intense filial love of the Father whom we all adore: so that our reverence is a children's reverence, and our fear a children's fear.—"All for Jesus." 108-110.

CIX

OUR GUARDIAN ANGEL

LONELINESS is one of the dangers which we have to fear, because of the inability of our mortal nature to cope with the adverse forces of the invisible world; and, to meet this danger, the provident love of God has given us our Guardian Angel. Ever at our sides there is a golden life being lived. A princely spirit is there, who sees God and enjoys the bewildering splendours of His Face even there, where he is, nearer to us than the limits of our outstretched arms. An unseen warfare is raging round our steps: but that beautiful bright spirit lets not so much as the sound of it yex our ears. He fights for us, and asks no thanks,

but hides his silent victories, and continues to gaze on God. His tenderness for us is above all words. His office will last beyond the grave, until at length it merges into a still sweeter tie of something like heavenly equality, when on the morning of the resurrection we pledge each other, in those first moments, to an endless blessed love. Till then we shall never know from how many dangers he has delivered us, nor how much of our salvation is actually due to him. Meanwhile he merits nothing by the solicitudes of his office. He is beyond the power of meriting, for he has attained the sight of God. His work is simply a work of love, because his sweet presence at our side he knows to be a part of God's eternal and creative love towards our particular soul.—"The Creator and the Creature," 279.

CX

THE SAVING OF A SOUL

Let us see what goes to the saving of a soul, and what is involved in its being saved. In the first place, it was absolutely necessary that God should become man, in order that that soul should be saved, according to the dispensation of God. It was absolutely necessary that Jesus should be born, teach, act, pray, merit, satisfy, suffer, bleed, die, for the saving of that single soul. It was necessary that there should be a Catholic Church, Faith, Sacraments, Saints, the Pope, and the Sacrifice of the Mass, for that one soul. It was necessary that there should be a supernatural gift, a marvellous participation of the Divine Nature, called sanctifying grace, and that on this should be accumulated loving acts and impulses of the Divine Will, in the shape of manifold actual graces,

preventing, accompanying, following, and efficacious, else that soul cannot be saved. Martyrs must die, doctors must write, Popes and councils must expose and condemn heresy, missionaries travel, priests be ordained, for the safety of that single soul. When all these preparations are completed, and by an act of merciful omnipotence that soul is created out of nothing, then there must be a Guardian Angel appointed over it; all through its life Jesus must be occupied about it; Mary must have a great deal to do with it; all the angels and saints must pray and interest themselves about it. To every good thought, pious word, and devout action, and, of course, they soon come to be innumerable, a participation of the Divine Nature, grace, must concur. Unseen evil spirits have to be warded off from it, and foiled in their attempts upon it. Hourly temptations have to cause more or less emotion among its advocates in heaven. Every attribute of God vouchsafes to legislate for its advantage, so that it plays upon them all like one who fingers the keys of a musical instrument. The Precious Blood has to be communicated to it through extraordinary Sacraments, which are full of mystery, and were invented both as to form and matter by our Lord Himself. All sorts of things, water, oil, candles, ashes, beads, medals, scapulars, have to be filled with a strange undefinable power by ecclesiastical benedictions in its behalf. The Body, Soul, and Divinity of the Incarnate Word have to be communicated to it over and over again till it becomes quite a common occurrence, though each time it is in reality a more stupendous action than the creation of the world. It can speak up to heaven, and be heard and obeyed there. It can spend the satisfactions of Jesus as if they were its own, and can undo bolts and bars in Purgatory, and choose by its own determinate will whom it will liberate, and whom it will pass over. Moreover, all

the time it is so near to God, and its heart is a place so sacred and so privileged, that none but God Himself can communicate grace to it, not even the angels, nor the Mother of God herself, blessed throughout all ages.

All this goes to the salvation of a soul. To be saved it has to be God's child, God's brother, and to participate in God's nature. Now see what is involved in its being saved. Look at that soul yonder that has just been judged; Jesus has this instant spoken; the sound of His sweet words has hardly died away; they that mourn have scarcely yet closed the eyes of the deserted body. Yet the judgment has come and gone; all is over; it was swift but merciful; more than merciful; there is no word to say what it was. It must be imagined. One day, please God! we shall experience it. That soul must be very strong to bear what it is feeling now. God must support it, or it will fall back into nothingness. Life is over. How short it has all been! Death is done with. How easy was its passing sharpness! How little the trials look, how puny the sorrows, how childish the afflictions! Now something has happened to it, which is to be for evermore. Jesus has said it. There can be no doubt about it. What is that something? Eye has not seen, nor ear heard. It sees God. There is stretched before it an illimitable eternity. Darkness has melted from before it. Weakness has fallen off from it. Time has vanished, that cramped it so. There is no ignorance. It sees the Eternal. Its understanding is inundated with unspeakable delights; it is strengthened by unimaginable glory; it abounds in that vision to which earthly science is an illiterate stupidity. The will is flooded with love; excessive happiness thrills through every affection. As a sponge is filled with the sea, so it is filled with light. beauty, bliss, ravishment, immortality, God. These are foolish words, lighter than feathers, weaker than water.

They are not a shadow of what it feels. Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, heart has not conceived. There it is on the threshold of it all; the same soul that but a moment ago was sobbing in pain, feeble as an unmanly child.—"All for Jesus," 92-95.

CXI

CO-REDEEMERS WITH CHRIST

THERE is something very touching to our affections to see how our dear Lord has vouchsafed, if I may say it, to leave His work unfinished in order that our love of Him may have the joy of finishing it. St. Paul might well say that he rejoiced in his sufferings for the Colossians, because thus he "filled up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in his flesh, for the Lord's body, which is His Church" (Col. i. 24). It is a great artifice of our Saviour's love that He has chosen to be so dependent upon us for the harvest of His Cross and Passion; and we must have cold hearts indeed if it does not move us. Take any one temptation from which vou suffer yourself. How wearisomely it dogs you, how miserably it entraps you; how it is always wakeful, always fixing itself on every good work, devotion, penance, prayer! How tired you get of resisting, how often you unhappily consent, how still more often you are teased and disquieted because you cannot make out whether you have consented or not! Yet every moment of resistance is a supernatural act, a victory of grace, an interest of Jesus. Nay, so also is every sigh of sorrow over a fall, every ejaculation sent up, arrow-like, to heaven, every naming of Jesus or Mary, on the confines and in the risk of sin. Now, how many thousands are there all the world over who are wearily fighting with the same temptation,

and possibly under more disadvantageous circumstances than yourself? See then how many interests of Jesus you can reach by intercession in this single respect; and I am purposely selecting a very trifling matter, trifling, that is, in comparison of other things where our Blessed Lord is yet more concerned. Do at least as much as this; intercede for those who are being tempted with the same temptation as yourself. Intercession can shut up casinos, take away licences of taverns, discountenance races, make it rain in Easter or in Whitsun-week, draw betting offices down to bankruptcy, and ruin unspeakable haunts of sin. If we can do such an immense work for Jesus, with scarcely any trouble to ourselves, can we think we love Him if we are not doing it? The flesh may tremble at the knots of the scourge, and the temper chafe at the prickling of the hair-shirt, and the tired and imprisoned limbs rebel even against our sleeping a night in our clothes; all this is intelligible; there may be love of Jesus with it all; it is only the old story of Peter's drowsiness-"the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak." But how we can love Jesus, and not practise intercession, is unintelligible. The wonder is how, prayer being what it is, those who really believe. can ever leave off praying, can ever do anything else but pray. This is the real wonder if we only come to think of it. This is a greater mystery than prayer itself.—" All for Jesus," 105-107.

CXII

THE SACRIFICE OF SELF

Sacrifice is peculiarly the Christian element of holiness; and it is precisely the element which corrupt nature dislikes and resists. There is no end to the delusions which our self-love is fertile enough to bring forth, in order to evade the obligation of sacrifice, or to narrow its practical application. If it were enough to have correct views, or high feelings, or devout aspirations, it would be easy to be spiritual. The touchstone is mortification. Worldly amusements, domestic comforts, nice food, and a daily doing our own will in the lesser details of life, are all incompatible with sanctity, when they are habitual and form the ordinary normal current of our lives. Pain is necessary to holiness. Suffering is essential to the killing of self-love. Habits of virtue cannot by any possibility be formed without voluntary mortification. Sorrow is needful for the fertility of grace. If a man is not making constant sacrifices, he is deceiving himself, and is not advancing in spirituality. If a man is not denying himself daily, he is not carrying the cross. These are axioms which at all times offend our weakness and self-indulgence. But they are of peculiar importance in times like these, when comforts and even luxuries are almost universal. It is comfort which is the ruin of holiness. Gaiety, fashion, ostentation, expensiveness, dissipation, frivolity, and the other things which make up a London season, are undoubtedly not the component parts of sanctity. But in my estimation they are far less worldly, have far less of the poison of worldliness in them, than the daily worship of comfort which distinguishes the great bulk of quiet people in these days. Many are not attracted by balls, parties, and similar fashions of amusement, and therefore have no merit in keeping away from them. But these same persons may set a great value upon the uninterrupted course of their daily comforts. They rise when they will, and gather every convenience round their rising. Their meals must be elegant, and pleasant, and faultless. Their servant-machinery must go smoothly, anticipating wants and keeping out of sight annoyances.

Their time must be for the most part at their own disposal. They must have the pastime of amusing conversation and of social intercourse; and they must be able to satisfy their restlessness when they please, by change of air and scene and company. There is generally a far greater intensity of worldliness in all this, than in the pleasurehunting riot of a London season. Thus we often find, in connection with this last, great graces, generous sacrifices, unexpected mortifications, and unkilled heavenly longings. But these are hardly ever found in the quiet, unobtrusive worship of domestic comfort. Yearly out of the dissipations of the great world come grand vocations. Every London season inscribes against its will some few glorious conversions in the annals of grace, conversions whose peculiar glory is the frankness of their generosity. Nothing grand ever comes out of the daily round of comfort. The heroic things of Christian attainment have less chance in quiet gardens and by pleasant river-sides than in the ballroom or the court. There is a smoothness in the mere lapse of a comfortable life, which is fatal to holiness. Now all the forms, and images, and associations, and pictures, and ideas, of the devotion to the Precious Blood breathe sacrifice. Their fragrance is the odour of sacrifice. Their beauty is the austerity of sacrifice. They tease the soul with a constant sense of dissatisfaction and distrust with whatsoever is not sacrifice; and this teasing is the solicitation of grace. In time they infect us with a love of sacrifice; and to gain this love of sacrifice is to have surmounted the first ascent of holiness, and to be breathing the pure air, and yet treading the more level road, of the upper table-land of the mountains of perfection. It is the very mission of the devotion of the Precious Blood to preach a crusade against quiet sinless comforts. The Mass is the compendium of the Gospel. It is a heresy in doctrine

to acknowledge the Sacrament and to deny the Sacrifice. Worldliness is guilty of a similar practical heresy with regard to holiness. It admits the claims of all its obligations but one, and that is the obligation of sacrifice.—" The Precious Blood," 276-278.

CXIII

OUR DAILY CROSS

EVERY morning of life we begin anew. We go forth from our doors to encounter a new day on its passage to eternity. It has much to say to us, and we to it; and it carries its tale to God at sunset, and its word is believed, and its message remembered till the doom. Would it not be an unproductive day, in which we did not meet our Lord? For is not that the very meaning of our lives? If the day is meant for the sun to shine, it is but half a day, or rather it is night, if only the material sun shall shine, and the Sun of Justice also rise not on us with health upon His wings. We go out to meet Jesus in every action of the day; but we require this fourth dolour to admonish us that we must rarely expect to meet Him, except with the Cross, and that a new one. When we are in sorrow, He Himself "draws near and goes with" us, as He did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. That is the privilege of sorrow. It is an attraction to our dearest Lord which He can seldom resist. Provided we seek not other comfort, He is sure to draw near and comfort us Himself. Oh! if unwary souls did but know the graces which they miss by telling their griefs and letting their fellow creatures console them, how saints would multiply in the Church of God! We read the lives of holy persons, and wonder how ever they can have attained to such a pitch of union with God, little

suspecting all the while that we have had sorrow enough to carry us further still than that, only we would not wait for Jesus; and if we will not let Him have the first word, He may perchance send His angels to fulfil our consolation, but He will not come Himself. But when we take the initiative, when we ourselves go out to meet Him, and we do so by our promises in prayer, by our open profession of piety, by our ecclesiastical vocation, by our religious profession, by the works of mercy to which we have now by usage committed ourselves, then it is always with the Cross that we encounter Him. Why then are we so amazed when crosses come? When it has happened thus so often, do we not see that it is a law, a law of the kingdom of grace, and that not to perceive it is to lose half its blessing by missing the promptitude of obedience? We lay ourselves in the arms of our Heavenly Father, knowing not what is to come, only that much is to come, more than without Him we could by possibility bear; let us lie still now that we are there, and not be surprised into retracting the offering we once have made. What cross we shall meet to-day, we know not: sometimes we cannot guess. But we know that, if we meet Jesus, we shall meet a cross, and evening will find us with the burden on our backs. Only let us remember this invariable peculiarity of these divine encounters, and then, if we are reverently wary in making promises, we shall also be reverently firm in keeping our resolutions.

Some men meet Him, and turn away. Some see Him far off, and turn down another road. Some come close up, and leap down the precipice at the side, as if He were a destroying angel blocking up the way. Some pass by, pretending they do not know Him. He has been walking cross-laden in thousands of earth's roads to-day; but He has had few honest greetings. Faith and love have made some men too

timid to pass Him or avoid Him, but they have expostulated with Him about the cross, and have wept out loud when He persisted. Some follow in the sullenness of servile obedience, and drag their cross, and it jolts upon the stones, and hurts them all the more, and they fall, but their falls are not in union with those of His upon the old Way of the Cross. Few kneel down with the alacrity of a glad surprise. and kiss His feet, and take the Cross off His back, and shoulder it almost playfully, and walk by His side, singing psalms with Him, and smiling when they totter beneath the load. But oh! the beauty of that day's sunset to such as these! They "constrain Him, saving, Stay with us, because it is towards evening, and the day is now far spent And He goes in with them." This is what we should do. Can we do it? No! but we can try, and then He will do it in us. But He meets us with the Cross. This implies much. It implies that we must turn back from our own road, and that all the way we went till we met Him was but waste of strength and fruitless travelling. We can only carry our crosses one way, and that is, heavenward. They keep our faces in that direction. They push us up hill: down hill they would prostrate us, and fall heavily upon us, and kill us. All the faces of cross-carriers are turned one way. The end, which is meant to go into the earth, points to the earth: the cross of the cross looks over our shoulders into heaven, and rights itself there, however unsteady we may be, like the needle always trembling in reverent fidelity towards the pole. So let us not miss our opportunity, but take up our cross at once, and turn round, and follow Him: for so only shall we fall into the Procession of the Predestinate.—"The Foot of the Cross," 235-237,

CXIV

"A SIGN WHICH SHALL BE CONTRADICTED"

The characteristic of Mary's sorrow is that Jesus caused it. But this is not peculiar to her affliction. He will be a cause of blessed sorrow to every one of us. There are very many happy earthly things which we must sacrifice for Him; or if we have not the heart to do so. He will have the kind cruelty to take them from us. Persecution is a word of many meanings, a thing of countless shapes. It must come infallibly to every one who loves our dearest Lord. It may come through the hard tongues of the worldly, or in the suspicions and jealousies and judgments of those we love. In the peace of family love and domestic union it often comes from hands which make it hard to be endured; and, because of religion, there is keen misery where the casual visitor sees nothing but the edification of mutual love. Who was ever let alone to serve Jesus as he wished? It is idle to expect it. The husband's love rises against it in the wife. The mother will tear her children from the Saviour's arms. The father looks with suspicion on the claims of God, and jealousy of the Creator will make him harsh to a child who has never given him an hour of trouble in life beside, and to whom he never has been harsh before. The brother will forego the manliness of fraternal affection, and bring the bitterness of the world's judgments into the sacred circle of home, if Jesus dares to lay a finger on his sister. O poor, poor world! And it is always the good who are the worst in this respect. Let this be laid to heart, and pondered. Outside of us, beside this inevitable persecution, our Lord will bring trials and crosses round us, at once to preserve our grace and to augment it. The more we love Him the

thicker they will be. Nay, our love of Him often gets us into trouble we hardly know how. It almost leads us into faults, into imprudences to be repented of. Suddenly, especially when we are fervent, the ground gives way under our feet, and we sink into a pit, and in the retrospect our fall seems inexcusable, and vet how did it all come to pass? How also is it within the soul? Are there not such things as the pains of love? Are they not more common than its joys? Then there is the worse pain of not feeling our love, of seeming to lose our love, of its for ever slipping away from us. There are also interior trials, by which self-love is put to a painful death, and a cleansing of our inmost souls by fire, which is exceeding agony. Then there are the distresses into which the love of Jesus entraps us. It persuades us to give up this world, to put out all the lights wherewith earth had made our hearts gav, to break ties, to eschew loves, to commit ourselves to hard dull lives, and then it leaves us. God hides his countenance from us. All view of the other world is shut off from us. Just as it is at sundown, no sooner has the last rim sunk below the horizon, than, as if evoked by a spell, from river-side, from woody hollow, from pastures where the kine are feeding, from meadows with the haycocks standing, there rises up a cold white blinding mist: so is it in the soul, no sooner is God's Face gone, than past sins, ghastly things, break up from the graves in which absolution laid them, and present imperfections, and unknown temptations, and chilling impossibilities of perseverance, all rise up together, and involve the soul in the coldest gloomiest desolation, through which no star can pierce, and it is much if a sickly whiteness tells us that there is a moon somewhere. Who does not know these things? It is no use shuddering. They are not on us now; but they will come back again, be sure, when their hour arrives. Thus, Jesus is in us a cause of sorrow,

in us He is a sign to be contradicted, in us is He set for the rise and fall of many.

These are the lessons which the first dolour teaches us, and they are lifelong lessons, as its sorrow was. Let us now go home to Nazareth with Mary. Angels accompany her steps, full of astonishment and reverence at her grief. Perhaps it is their first lesson in the profound science of the Passion. So she went her way through the streets of Sion, and over the hills, and through the glens by the water-courses, until she came to the green basin of Nazareth, the Mother bearing her Child! And they were all in all to each other. And who shall tell what mute language they spoke, as the Child's Heart beat against the Mother's heart in sorrow and in love? And each was dearer to the other than before, and we also perhaps were dearer to them than an hour ago: for the shadow of Calvary had already fallen, both on the Mother and the Son; and they loved the shadow; and it was we who cast it.—" The Foot of the Cross," 101-103.

CXV

PHYSIOLOGY AND PIETY

WE must not forget that many of the phenomena of the spiritual life spring from physical causes. Our body can go wrong short of illness, short of ailment. It is a very delicate and capricious instrument. The reaction after hard work, different seasons of the year, individual constitution, very slight atmospherical disturbances, all of them tend to bring forth many moral results, without the intervention of actual pain or positive malady. This is a very difficult subject to handle. It is full of dangers. We are all of us too much inclined to make concessions to our

bodies. Reliance on comforts is quite incompatible with true liberty of spirit. The worship of health is one of the most efficient and extensive causes of lukewarmness and indevotion. At the same time the fact is true, that our soul is very much dependent on our body. If we begin attributing to supernatural causes, whether to the operations of grace or to the wiles of Satan, what is really a matter of nerves or of digestion, we are soon in the land of mischievous delusions. We become discouraged when we have no need to be so, and elated when we have no right to be so. We believe our inner self to be the theatre of much that is not going on there at all, and our self-knowledge becomes clouded by exaggeration.

But the important thing to be considered is, that our physical difficulties have to be sanctified just as much as our spiritual difficulties. Bodily disturbance is no dispensation from duty, until it begins to be something like an incapability, or at least until the attempt to discharge the duty would be an imprudence. This is the common mistake. Granted, that our evil temper comes just now from nerves or indigestion: but not granted, that it is on that account to be any the less combated. The monstrous assumption, which we most of us make, is that this corporal annoyance, which accounts for our irritability or any other sin, also excuses it. For this there is not a shadow of proof. To account for a thing, and to excuse a thing, are two vastly different processes. Charity may use such an assumption in our judgments of others, in order to justify the ingenuity of its benignant constructions. But we cannot use it as a plea for self-acquittal, and rarely even as an argument for diminution of self-punishment. If we once so much as begin to do this, we have not merely taken a step off the right road, but we have fallen over a precipice. The same reasoning obviously applies to mental unwellness, to sorrow,

vexation, misfortune, uncertainty, the sense of injustice, wounded feelings, or the chafing of responsibilities. These harassments are the sources of many things which go wrong in the spiritual life. But while they account for them, they do not excuse them. For these bodily and mental necessities and infirmities are just what we have to defend ourselves against, and bring into subjection to grace. At the same time, we shall be more simple, childlike, genuine, and straightforward, when we attribute the discomforting phenomena without surprise to these natural causes, than when we fancy all manner of supernatural possibilities which have no real existence in our case, and the thought of which is in itself enough to do us harm, because it engenders in us a kind of confused and underground feeling that we are suffering, or being put through, something in common with the saints. - "Spiritual Conferences," 246-248.

CXVI

SENSITIVENESS

Sensitiveness peculiarly enables us to understand God, to penetrate the meaning of His ways with us, to feel each touch of His grace, to discover the faintest workings of a divine vocation, and to be uneasy under any scarcely perceptible drifting away from His Will. We are enabled by it to correspond to the jealousy of God, that jealousy which is a characteristic of His sanctity, and enters so deeply into all His dealings with souls that are aiming at perfection. Sensitiveness also makes us unworldly, by continually bringing home to us our unfitness for the world. It is a gift whose dower is suffering, and which therefore makes us pine in our exile, even while it is contributing joys which

are the best natural consolations of that exile. It is a source of sanctification uniting in itself all the four excellences, according to which we judge of the importance and efficacy of means of grace. It is constant; it is acute; it is unsuspected; it is fatal to self-love. By unsuspected I mean two things: first, that it goes on sanctifying us even while we are not adverting to the fact, and secondly, that so little delusion adheres to its method of operation that we may trust ourselves to it without suspicion.

Last of all, it is a peculiar Christ-like fountain of suffering. Think of the mystery of the Agony in the garden. It was a great part of that mystery that therein our dearest Lord put Himself in the place of every one of us. He bore our sins; He identified Himself with our shames; He felt our shrinkings. Our finest sensitiveness is coarse and blunt compared with His. We rudely pressed every one of the quivering keys of His Sacred Heart, and made it utter the low and plaintive notes of a sorrow beyond our understanding. He shrank, like a sensitive plant, from the shame with which we covered Him. In the other mysteries of the Passion we have outward pains, external shame, publicity, unkindness, and the desertion of friends: but the suffering of the Agony was in no slight degree, and above the other mysteries, the keenness of wounded feelings. To us, therefore, the model and the consolation in our excess of wounded feelings is that most dear and divine Heart, whose inward wound finds words in the Reproaches of Good Friday .--"Spiritual Conferences," 273, 274.

CXVII

TOUCHINESS ABOUT THE THINGS OF GOD

WE know perfectly what it is to be touchy about our own interests, or the interests of those who are near and dear to us. We fire up at the hint or suspicion of an attack. We are always on the look out with a watchful jealousy, as if everybody we met had a design upon us. We are quick to complain, and quick to discern. Sometimes, if we do not take care, we judge others censoriously, or we lose our temper and speak rudely. Now, apply all this to the interests of Jesus, and you will get a very fair idea of what it is to be a saint. Yet even good people do not understand it, and condemn it as extravagance and indiscretion, simply because they do not know what it is to serve God with a service of love. A man who is thus touchy about the interests of Jesus, hears of some scandal, and it makes him perfectly miserable. He broods over it day and night; he talks querulously about it; it takes the sunshine out of his life for the time being. His friends cannot conceive why he should make so much of it, or take it so to heart. It is no affair of his, and there is no blame attaching to him in the matter. They are ready to accuse him of affectation; but they do not see that all his love is for Jesus, and that it is positive pain to him that his dear Lord's interests should be injured. They could fret for a month over being vexatiously entangled in a spiteful and unjust lawsuit; but what is that to the least hindrance thrown in the way of the interests of Jesus? Surely a man who does not see this must have something the matter with his Christian eyesight.

Another way in which this touchiness about the interests of Jesus is shown, is in the delicate perception and keen abomination of heresy and false doctrine. The purity of the true faith is one of the very dearest interests of Jesus; and, consequently, one who truly loves his Lord and Master is pained beyond the power of words by the expression of false doctrine, especially among Catholics. Opinions about our Lord's ignorance, or in depreciation of His grace, or in derogation of His Mother's honour, or lowering the Sacraments, or dishonouring ever so little the prerogatives of His Vicar upon earth—these things, merely in passing conversation, sting him so that he feels even bodily suffering from them. Unreflecting people are almost scandalized at this; but it is only because they cannot appreciate in spiritual things a delicacy and a sensitiveness which would come almost natural to them in worldly things. Thus, you will not find a single saint who has not cherished this pain of love in his heart of hearts, this inability to endure the sound of heresy or false doctrine; and where this is not, then, as sure as the sun is in the heavens, the love of Jesus is but poor and weak in the heart of man.

The same touchiness may be shown, as occasion requires, about all the interests of Jesus. One remark, however, must be made. It will often happen when a man's love of our Lord is beyond the formed habits of virtue he may have at the moment, that he is indiscreet, or impatient, or rude, or bitter. He suspects where there is no ground for suspicion, and he does not bear with the slowness or coldness of others, as he would do if the habit of charity were more perfectly formed in him. This often brings discredit on devotion; for there are no persons judged with more unfeeling rigour than those who make profession of a devout life. But they must have their faults and imperfections; they must have the less lovely stages of the spiritual life to pass through; and it must be their consolation that many a time when men blame them, Jesus does not; and the very

imperfections of their young love are dear to Him, while the sage criticism and pompous moderation of their censors are hateful in His eyes.

Now, it would not be hard to cultivate this touchiness about the interests of Jesus; and yet it is one of the chief instincts of the saints. Is it not worth while trying? Can there be a pleasure in life so great as loving Jesus and serving Him for love? We may begin to-day: there is no hardship in it; no sudden or violent change which we need to make in our lives; we have only got to think a little more about love, and to ask for more love, and then we are fairly on the road.—"All for Jesus," 37-39.

CXVIII

UNHAPPY CONVERTS

It is a great mistake to think lightly of happiness in religion, of enjoyment in religious services, of sweetness in prayer, of gladness in mortification, and of sensible devotion. True it is that when God subtracts them, it is not necessarily in anger or as a chastisement; and whatever be the cause. our plain duty is to submit ourselves to His sweet though inscrutable will. But this does not hinder all these things from being mighty aids in the spiritual life, and therefore to be desired and coveted with earnestness, though in a submissive spirit. Who does not know cases where everything seems to go wrong because a person has no happiness in religion? Even at Mass and Benediction a veil is over their hearts, which neither music nor brightness, nor yet the Divine Presence, can go through. God's blessings are as dull to such people as His chastisements are to the generality of men. Prayer is a penance: confession a torture: Communion a very rack. What God blesses for them, irritates like a sore. What He fills with peace, troubles them with disquietude. They have no light but the gloom of their own perverse moodiness; and they have no song but peevishness.

Inquire if such persons have ever had a spirit of thanksgiving, and you will find you have hit exactly on the characteristic omission of their lives. Perhaps they have been converts to the holy faith. They have obeyed grace grudgingly. When they were safe in the Church, they would see difficulties everywhere, from the Pope and Roman manners downwards. Imaginary evils surrounded every step. There was temporal unhappiness; and was the faith worth it? There was the annovance of learning a new religion, and new ceremonies, and this made them snappish. Then preachers said such strong things; and they must complain to a score of people of this, as if everything was to be suited to them. It was the Assumption, and the dear good Irish wanted to hear of their Mother's Coronation; but then this important convert was at church, and had brought an important Protestant friend with him, and should have been consulted, or forewarned. It was so unkind, so injurious, in his or her presence, to say Our Lady had twelve stars on her head. Were they planets or fixed stars? The whole matter is full of difficulties. Really, preachers should be more careful! Then in the confessional it was all so uncomfortable, so coarse, and vulgar, and matter-of-fact. There was so little smooth talking, and yet much which was so dreadfully to the point. Thus, from one cause or other, the poor convert has been miserable ever since conversion; and why? Immersed in self, and magnifying self, seeking consolations, and hungering after sympathy, such persons have hardly once fallen like children on their knees, to thank God for the miracle of love

which brought them where they are. A thankful heart would have taken joyously all the incipient difficulties of its new position, as a penance for the hard-heartedness which had given grace so much trouble and cost it so many efforts in the process of conversion. But these persons were not thankful, and so they are not happy; let us thank God that their numbers are so few. This, however, is another point to be made much of, that happiness in religion comes from the spirit of thanksgiving.—" All for Jesus," 264-266.

CXIX

RELIGIOUS ENTHUSIASM

Has real piety a greater or a deadlier enemy than the popular ideas of enthusiasm? If a person loses his taste for worldly amusements and blameless dissipations, if he prefers the Church to the theatre, early Mass to lying in bed, almsgiving to fine dress, spiritual books to novels, visiting the poor to driving in the park, prayer to parties, he is forthwith set down as an enthusiast; and though people do not exactly know what enthusiasm is, yet they know that it is something inconceivably bad; for it is something young people should be especially warned against, and above all pious people, as most needing such admonition. The mere word enthusiasm is a power in itself; for it accuses, tries, condemns, and punishes a man all at once. Nothing can be more complete.

Yet, in the first place, dear reader, look over your numerous acquaintance; and tell us,—whatever may be your notion of religious enthusiasm, did you ever know anyone injured by it? You have heard that it makes people mad: did you ever have one of your own friends driven mad by it? And while you condemned their enthusiasm,

did you ever yourself get quite rid of a feeling that, however unfit it was for life, it would be far from an undesirable state to die in? In the next place, what is enthusiasm? Dr. Johnson tells us that it is a "vain belief of private revelations": did any of your devout friends dream that they had had private revelations? It is "a heat of imagination": did not your friends seem to grow cold rather than hot? Were they not often tempted to go your way because it was pleasanter? Did they not find it hard to persevere in spiritual practices, and did they not embrace them, not at all from any imagination hot or cold, but simply because they thought it right, and because grace had begun to change their tastes? It is "an exaltation of ideas": now, were not the ideas of your friends, in any true sense of the word, rather depressed than exalted? Were they not more humble, more submissive, more obliging; or, at least, whenever they were not so, did you not distinctly feel that they were acting inconsistently with their religious profession? Were any of their ideas in any sense exalted, even of those which had most to do with their pious practices? Were not even those ideas rather subdued than exalted?

These are Dr. Johnson's three definitions. They will not suit you. Do you mean then by enthusiasm, doing too much for God? You would not like to say so. Do you mean doing it in the wrong way? But is daily Mass wrong, is almsgiving wrong, are spiritual books wrong, is visiting the poor wrong, is prayer wrong? Or will you say it is doing them instead of other things which are not sinful? Well! but is not this tyranny? A man might answer, If an opera would be to me the most tiresome of penances, or a ball the most unendurable of wearinesses, why am I obliged to go? Or if I simply prefer prayer to the opera, or spiritual reading to the ball, why am I to have less liberty in gratifying my tastes than you in gratifying yours? Do you

mean that God spoils everything He touches, and is a marpleasure wherever He interferes? The truth is that, by enthusiasm men mean the being more religious than themselves. And this is an unpardonable offence; for they are the standards of what is moderate, sober, rational, and reflective. Enthusiasm, in common parlance, has no other meaning. Whoever uses the word is simply making public confession of his own tepidity.

Thus, the whole popular standard of practical religion is wrong and unfair, because it is fixed with reference to a false calculation; and it is this which leads to the popular fallacy about enthusiasm. If men realized more truly and more habitually what it is to have a Creator, and how much follows from that elementary truth as to the nature and amount of the service we owe Him, there can be no doubt they would assent to a far higher standard on the unsuspicious evidence of natural reason and common-sense, than they will now concede to the arguments of spiritual books which are founded on higher motives, and appeal to a greater variety of considerations. The fact is that we only appreciate God's goodness, in proportion as by His grace we become good ourselves; and His goodness is so great and high and deep and broad, that it makes little impression upon the dulness of our spiritual sense, until it is quickened and sharpened with heavenly light. And thus, when we are low in grace, and unpractised in devotion, the simple truth that God is our Creator, and that a Creator necessarily implies what we have seen it implies, will come home to us with greater force, and make a more decided impression, than the complex consideration of the further and higher mercies, which God has so multiplied upon us that they almost seem to hide one another's brightness. No man would accuse his neighbour of enthusiasm, which is a practical endeavour to lower the standard of his religious

practice, if he saw that his practice already fell short of what plain common-sense and decency require from a creature.—" The Creator and the Creature," 89-91.

CXX

HAPPINESS IN RELIGION

Nothing is easy which does not make us happy while we are doing it. Have you been happy in your religion? Far from it! It has been a simple burden to you. If it had not been for heaven and hell, you would have made short work of it long since. But heaven and hell are facts: there they are; and there is no help for us. As, then, we must be religious, I am for a happy religion. I see no use in an unhappy one, if God gives me my choice. But He has done more than that. He wishes me to be happy in my religion. Nay, He wishes my religion to be the happiness and sunshine of my life. Now, a happy religion means a religion of love. Everything comes easy to love. Thus, I am dependent for my happiness on no one but Jesus. My religion makes me happy all the day long. If serving Jesus out of love were some prodigiously difficult thing, like the contemplation of the saints, or their austerities, then it would be another matter. But the fact is, it is nothing of the kind. To serve God because you are afraid of going to hell, and wish to go to heaven, is a great blessing and a supernatural work; but it is very difficult. Whereas, to serve God because you love Him is so easy, that it is hard to account for so many men in the world neglecting to do it. Stupid souls, so miraculously blind!

But it is a further blessing, that what makes you happy makes our dearest Lord happy also; and the thought of this again makes us so happy that we can hardly contain ourselves, and then that again makes Him happier still. Thus, religion grows sweeter and sweeter. Life is one long joy, because the will of God is always being done in it, and the glory of God always being got from it. You become identified with the interests of Jesus; you wed them as if they were your own, as indeed they are. His spirit steals into you, and sets up a little throne in your heart, and crowns itself, and then most sweetly proclaims itself king. It gained the crown by a dear conspiracy; you never suspected what divine love was about all the while. But so it is. God's glory becomes dear to you; you become quite touchy about our Lord, for He is become the apple of your eye; and you are drawn to save souls, because it is what He is always doing, and so you get an instinct and a taste for it yourself. So it all goes on; and so you live; yet not you, but Christ lives in you; and so you die. You never suspect you are a saint, or anything approaching one. Your life is hid with Christ in God, and hid from no one more than from yourself. You a saint indeed! Your humility would either laugh, or be frightened, at the bare thought. But oh! the depth of the mercies of Jesus! What will be your surprise at His judgment-seat, to hear the sweet sentence, to see the bright crown! You will almost argue against your own salvation! Our Lord makes the elect do so in the Gospel: "Lord, when saw we Thee hungry, and fed Thee? When saw we Thee thirsty, and gave Thee drink?" They cannot make it out. In all their love for Jesus, they never dreamed it was so great a thing as this. Only serve Jesus out of love! You cannot beat God in the strife of love! Only serve Jesus out of love, and while your eyes are yet unclosed, before the whiteness of death is yet settled on your face, or those around you are sure that that last gentle breathing was indeed your last, what an unspeakable surprise will vou have had at the

judgment-seat of your dearest Love, while the songs of heaven are breaking on your ears, and the glory of God is dawning on your eyes, to fade away no more for ever!—
"All for Jesus," 52, 53.

CXXI

TENDERNESS IN RELIGION

THE spirit of the Gospel is tenderness; and these three wants I have been examining, of devotion to our Lady, of devotion to the Sacred Humanity, and of filial feelings towards God, are at once effects of want of tenderness, and causes of the continued want. This is the great occult hindrance. With your chivalrous desire for perfection, your disgust with the world, and your appreciation of high things, you expect to be making progress, and are disappointed. I have already asked you to examine yourselves, and see whether you are not wanting in devotion to our Blessed Lady, to our dear Lord's Sacred Humanity, and to the ever-blessed Paternity of God. Now let me put it in another shape. The want of these three things means in reality the want of tenderness, though it means other things as well. But the absence of tenderness in religion is often of itself enough to stay a man's growth in holiness. It is worth while, therefore, to say something on this head. A man may be in a certain sense religious: he may fear God, hate sin, be strictly conscientious, and honestly desire to save his soul. All these are most excellent things. But you cannot say that the saints were men of this sort. They had about them a sweetness, a softness, a delicacy, a gentleness, an affectionateness, nay, I will dare to say, a poetry, which gave quite a different character to their devotion. They were living images of Jesus. This, in our far inferior measure and degree, we also must strive to be, if we would grow in holiness.

By tenderness is not meant a mere impressionableness, soft-heartedness, or a facility of tears. These are as often marks of cowardice, laziness, and a want of resolute will and earnestness. True tenderness begins in various ways. Its progress is marked by a sorrow for sin, without thinking of its punishment, by what I have elsewhere called a touchiness about the interests of Jesus, by childlike docility to our superiors and spiritual directors, by mortifying ourselves and not feeling it a yoke, by never thinking of stopping short at precepts without going on to counsels, and by a very faint, incipient, and as yet scarcely discernible, appetite for humiliations. According as it is formed in our souls, all the characteristics of sanctity gather to it and group themselves round it. For love is a greater safeguard against sin than fear, and tenderness renders our conversion to God more entire by making it more easy. It especially attracts Jesus, whose spirit it is, and who will not be outdone in His own peculiar sweetness. Without this tenderness there can be no growth; and while it renders duty more easy, and consequently the performance of duty more perfect, it instils into us the especially Christian like instincts, such as love of suffering, silence under injustice, a thirst for humiliations, and the like. Moreover, it deepens sorrow for sin into a contrition, which is worth more to the penitent soul than almost any gift that can be named. Look at the phenomena of the Incarnation, what were they? Helplessness, unnecessary and unobliged suffering, sacrifice, abasement, continual defeat, no assertion of rights, carelessness of success, and most pathetic wrongs. And what is our response to all these things but the temper which is expressed by that one word tenderness?

The Sacred Infancy teaches us tenderness; the Passion

tenderness; the Blessed Sacrament tenderness; the Sacred Heart tenderness. But look at the common life of Jesus among men, and you will see more clearly what this tenderness is like. There is first the tenderness of our Lord's outward deportment. The narrative of Palm Sunday is an instance of it. Also His way with His disciples, His way with sinners, and His way with those in affliction or grief who threw themselves in His road. He quenched not the smoking flax nor broke the bruised reed. This was a complete picture of Him. There was tenderness in His very looks, as when He looked on the rich young man and loved him; and St. Peter was converted by a look. His whole conversation was imbued with tenderness. The tone of His parables, the absence of terrors in His sermons, and the abyss of forgiveness which His teaching opens out, all exemplify this. He is no less tender in His answer to questions, as when He was accused of being possessed, and when He was struck on the face. His very reprimands were steeped in tenderness: witness the woman taken in adultery, James and John, and the Samaritan, and Judas; nor was His zeal less tender, as was evidenced when He rebuked the brothers who would fain have called down fire from heaven upon the Samaritan villagers, and also by the sweet meekness of His divine indignation when He cleared the temple.

Now, if our Lord is our model, and if His spirit be ours, it is plain that a Christian-like tenderness must make a deep impression upon our spiritual life, and indeed give it its principal tone and character. Without tenderness we can never have that spirit of generosity in which we saw that we must serve God. It is as necessary to our interior life, or our relation with God, as it is to our exterior life or relation with others; and there is one gift of the Holy Ghost, namely, piety, whose special office it is to confer this tenderness.—" Growth in Holiness," 57-59.

CXXII

INTERIOR RELIGION

Perhaps nothing strikes converts in the devotional system of the Church so much as the value and importance assigned to interior acts. They are surprised at the duty, under pain of sin, of acts of faith, hope, charity, and contrition, at recurring periods or under given circumstances. They are startled at the commentaries on our Lord's doctrine about committing sin in our hearts. They have to reconcile themselves to the influence attributed to intention. Now, all this, just like the rest of the Catholic system, brings out God. God is a simple act. Whatsoever is done stands in a certain relation to God. All its meaning and reality is from this. Words, therefore, are but accidents. Nay, overt acts add but little, comparatively, to the malice of the interior will. The thought has been assented to; the intention has been formed; the temptation has been deliberately admitted; the thing is irrevocable. It has touched God, and is stereotyped. He needs no index of the voice nor consummation of the hands. It is an act, and ranks as such with Him, for good or evil, for reward or punishment. Sins of thought, says the Council of Trent, have these frightful characteristics: first, that they sometimes make a greater wound in the soul than sins of deed; and, secondly, that they are sometimes more dangerous,-"Nonnunquam animam gravius sauciant, et periculosiora sunt iis quæ manifeste admittuntur." They are also more numerous, more easily committed, and their approaches frighten us less.

Now, the reality of the merit of devout desires, of mental praise, and of all interior as well as spoken acts of devotion, is the loving side of this question. They need be nothing more than interior acts. Nothing more is necessary. They have touched God as such, and so have received their value and their merit. Thus, turning the tables on sins of thought, we may say that these interior acts of piety sometimes make a greater impression on the soul than exterior ones; while they have the further advantage of being more numerous and more easily performed. But is it not enough to vex our love, to go and stand by the countless seas of men's hearts, and to watch the innumerable waves that stir and brighten in every one of them every minute, and to think there is not one wave or ripple that might not rival an angel's song for worth before the dear Majesty of God; and yet that this treasure is so little used, that men take so little pains about it, and that God is so defrauded of His glory? He so loves us, and He so longs for our love, that He has made it almost as easy, by the merits of Jesus, for our hearts to praise Him, as for the thurible to let the spires of sweet smoke issue through its perforated cover; and yet we will not even do so much as that! -" All for Jesus," 281, 282,

CXXIII

WORKS OF MERCY

LET us look at the popular modern spirituality in connection with this test of external works of mercy. The London season does not more surely bring with it new modes of dress, than it brings also with it new plans of doing good and benefiting the poor. When we have not had much experience, we respect all this. Anything seems good which is for the poor. What a gain that the rich of this world should take a fancy to any works of mercy, no matter what! But this satisfaction soon passes away, when the vexatious sight of money squandered, of time wasted, of

beginnings discontinued, of inert committees organised, of the obvious pursuit of excitement and self-love in the whole matter, has tried our patience year after year. It is also the more difficult to keep our temper with inefficient charity, because it is so seldom innocuous as well as inefficient. Now we get a glimpse of what this spirituality is worth. A Mahometan with his five posture-penances a day is a happy man; for he feels he must do something to make his conscience easy, something for God, something in the way of religion: and he has done it, done enough to make him feel he has done something. So it is with these annual fashions of charity. Christians must feel as if they were doing something for God; or else they will not be easy. So they get up a good work. It takes some time to call on others, and talk it over. Some further time to take the advice of half a dozen popular preachers or directors. A little more time to decide on following the advice of none of them. Then some clerical head has to be chosen for the work, and that takes time. After that, the Lent services render any other excitement unnecessary just then. Now Easter has come, and there is an interruption because of people going down into the country. Then the Month of Mary has excitements of its own; and it is well advanced before the committee is formed. When it is formed, it has to meet. When it meets, it naturally talks. What would happen if it began to do anything, it is impossible to say. We cannot think of that without some degree of consternation. However, there is the excitement of having to work with strange people, the important excitement in some cases of having to try to get Government aid or to call on philanthropic magistrates, and the peculiar excitement perhaps of having to work with our inferiors in rank and station. and so to practise the condescensions of a sort of Christian freemasonry, which somehow or other satisfies some name-

less craving in our conscience. Meanwhile the season thickens, and at last closes. All that was wanted has been done; for all that was wanted was the self-righteous feeling that we were very busy for God, and also the manifold satisfaction of half a dozen kinds of self-love. The excitement has been pleasant, the feeling of being good more pleasant still: and the fact, that it has all come to an end without our having had to pay anything for it, has been without doubt the pleasantest feature of the transaction. It has got us through the season. We could enjoy our expensiveness more comfortably while we believed ourselves on the road to some considerable imaginary alms. An hour of committee, besides being chatty and agreeable, will sanctify long, long hours of shopping. What a wonderful exercise of humility was that conventual bazaar! Our intense delight in the salient worldliness of the year, whatever it was, has been well counteracted by the dim vision of romantic garrets, or of interesting orphans, or of palsied pensioners, or of picturesque young thieves, or of reclaimed children in tasteful uniforms, or of distant idolaters, or of domestic hunger-bitten heathen. It has all been the ounce of God to the hundredweight of the world, the adequate corrective, the proper proportion of alkali to our acid.

Yet almsgiving was not exactly meant as a corrective of worldliness. Might not light be let into many minds, if they would distinctly put before themselves the final cause of riches? Why are there any rich people at all, and what does God mean by them? For there is only one real truth about any of the facts of the world, and that truth is God's meaning of the fact, God's intention in the ordering or permitting of it. Now what are rich people meant for? They are not made rich for their own good. That is quite plain. A man's good consists in the saving of his soul; but it is plain riches do not help him to save his soul, rather the

contrary. Jesus would not have riches, when He came. Nay, He pronounced woe to those who have them. When the saints have had them, they have made away with them as fast as they could. Riches, if the Gospel be true, are the unheavenliest of all earthly things. Why then are some men put into a less advantageous position than others, so far as regards the salvation of their souls, by having riches allotted to them? What are rich people meant for? To be the prey of the poor. Prey! there is no other word for it. The rich are meant for the poor. The poor are the cause and the significancy, as they will be also the salvation, of the rich. The poor are God's eagles to beset, infest, and strip the rich. He alone is happy in his riches, who lets these eagles of God tear him with least resistance. That process, rich man! is what thou art meant for. God had no other intention in thee. If there be a heaven and a hell, there is nothing which it more behoves thee to know than this peculiarity of thy position. Are the poor wearisome, grasping, unseasonable, insatiable, unreasonable, innumerable, unbearable? It is more unreasonable in thee to complain. They were meant to prey upon thee: thou wert meant to be their prey. That is the whole account of thee. Give then, and be silent.

To sum it all up:—Look at the eccentricities in almsgiving, at the appetite for novelties, at the neglect of old charities, at the infinite subdivision of efforts which are thus completely neutralized, at the prominence of self, at the self-opinionatedness, at the folio volumes of talk or the duodecimo volumes of notepaper, at the subordinate position of God in the matter, at the little amount of keen sympathy for the misery to be dealt with, at the less amount of self-denial in the dealing with it, and, last of all, at the astounding moderation of the subscriptions. Surely all this testifies to a huge amount of delusion and fond inward

flattering of self in the spirituality around us. It sometimes almost makes one think that works of mercy are simply an imposture. But, all the while, the imposture lies in a spirituality without solid mortification. Tried in the balance of outward charity, how much fair-looking interior piety is grievously found wanting! If all this is ill-natured, is it not also true? Depend upon it, genuine mercy is very rare. Real almsgivers must have either an unusual nobility of natural character, or a very solid virtue. Devotion to the poor is, in its disinterested purity, the rarest grace in sanctity. In its debased state, it is one of the commonest features of a piety, the unsoundness of which is testified by nothing so much as the unreality of its mercy.—"Spiritual Conferences," 341-344.

CXXIV

MARTHA AND MARY

The contemplative life is one thing, and the active life another, and each has its own retinue and appurtenances; and consistency is the secret of success. Now, except a few, a very few singular vocations, devout people living in the world are called, as living in the world, to an active life. Yet here is a mistake into which they constantly fall. They make their spirituality to be all interior, while the whole of their active life is for the world and essentially worldly, just like Methodists, who keep Sunday for religion, and the weekdays for the world. These good people have no Christian active life, and so the prayers and the church-goings will not keep the peace with the parks and the parties, and at last devotion gets the worst of it, and signs away its rights in a base concordat. In other words, dear reader! I suspect,—I only say suspect, for I have no right to anything

beyond a suspicion in spiritual science,—I suspect that we can have no devout lives in the world without some active tending of the poor! Visiting the sick, looking after schools, attending hospitals, having to do with penitents and foundlings, emigrants and soup-kitchens, I suspect the secret of perfection in the world, and of perseverance in devotion in the world, lies in these things. To live interior contemplative lives in the world for three hours a day, is a glorious thing. But you see, unluckily, it hardly ever lasts. What now if it really be that I am right, and that the reason of the failure is, that to give all your interior life to God, and all your exterior life to the world, is an unlawful division; and that, if the rich are to be holy, they must either strip themselves of their riches, and hide themselves behind a convent grille, or in the ranks of the priesthood, or they must labour with their own hands for those below them, and make themselves companions of the poor?

You see, your Christian life is made up of Mass, Communion, meditation, examen, some little austerities, and the like. But all this is more or less contemplative, so long as it stands by itself. It is all most excellent. But you are called to something additional, to an active Christian life, to the apostolate of the rich, which consists in assiduous and affectionate works of mercy for the poor. Look abroad into Catholic countries, where the middle class of holy people so abounds, and is so fruitful of good works and so graceful in its spiritual beauty. It looks as if the secret there was in this glorious activity for the poor. When you come from prayer, or from church, you cannot without singularity carry vour outward recollection into company, and somehow prayer is like a delicate bloom upon the soul; the hot air of the world's rooms dissipates it speedily. But if you come from the garret or the hospital, the workhouse or the cellar, you have a charmed atmosphere around you, which is a sort of panoply of paradise, from which the venomous arrows of the world glance off blunted and innocuous. It wears well. It cannot be smiled away, or talked off, or gossiped to pieces, like the exotic bloom of prayer. Everywhere, where the world is, there is danger to the soul; but the gaiety, the pleasure, or the fashion, can hardly be named, which active mercy to the poor cannot disarm of all its perils, and even sanctify. Depend upon it, with you who live in the world, mercy is but another word for perseverance, and the touch of the poor the Real Presence of your Lord.—"All for Jesus," 322, 323.

CXXV

RECOLLECTION

RECOLLECTION is a double attention which we pay first to God and secondly to ourselves; and without vehemence or straining, yet not without some painful effort, it must be as unintermitting as possible. The necessity of it is so great that nothing in the whole of the spiritual life, love excepted, is more necessary. We cannot otherwise acquire the habit of walking constantly in the presence of God; nor can we without it steer safely through the multitude of occasions of venial sin which surround us all day long. The whispered inspirations of the Holy Ghost pass away unheard and unheeded. Temptations surprise us and overthrow us; and prayer itself is nothing but a time of more than usual distractions, because the time out of prayer is not spent in recollection. The very act by which we apply our attention to prayer does little more than empty our minds of our duties, so as to give more room for distractions than we had while hand and head and heart were in the occupations of daily life.

This habit of recollection is only to be acquired by degrees. There is no royal road to it. We must make the occasional practice of silence one of our mortifications, if we can do so without singularity or ostentation; and seeing that for the most part we all talk more in conversation than others would wish us to do, it would not be hard to mortify ourselves in this way. We should also watch jealously any eagerness to hear news, and to know what is going on in the great world around us. Until we feel the presence of God habitually, and can revert to Him easily, it is astonishing with what readiness other subjects can preoccupy and engross us; and it is just this which we cannot afford to let them do. Newspapers keep not a few back from perfection. Visiting the Blessed Sacrament daily is another means of acquiring recollection. We feel the visit long after it is over. It makes a silence in our hearts, and wraps an atmosphere around us, which rebuke the busy spirit of the world. The practice of retaining some spiritual flower, maxim, or resolution, from our morning's meditation, in order to supply us with matter for ejaculatory prayer during the day, is a great help to the same end. Bodily mortification is a still greater, especially the custody of the senses, when we can practise it unnoticed. But the greatest help of all is to act slowly. Eagerness, anxiety, indeliberation, precipitancy, these are all fatal to recollection. Let us do everything leisurely, measuredly, and slowly, and we shall soon become recollected, and mortified as well. Nature likes to have much to do, and to run from one thing to another; and grace is just the opposite of this.—" Growth in Holiness," 24, 25.

CXXVI

THE SPIRIT OF ADORATION

The spirit of adoration may be said to comprehend seven visions of God. First of all, it is seeing Him everywhere. No corner so dark, no occupation so unlikely, no interest so thoroughly worldly, but adoration sees God manifest in it, and kneels down there to worship Him. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." This spirit acknowledges the dominion of evil nowhere, nowhere leaves the devil to himself or in possession, withdraws from no ground, but everywhere plants God's banner, and everywhere makes open acknowledgment of His universal sovereignty.

Secondly, it sees God great everywhere. It discerns the intrinsic grandeur of all His operations and all His permissions. He consecrates everything; His presence is magnificence. Thus the spirit makes no compromises with the world. It gives up nothing, because nothing to its eye is small enough that it should dare to give it up or barter it away. God has touched it, and lo! it has swelled to dimensions of vastness and of dignity, and has outgrown all terrestrial room. On this account its seriousness can make light of nothing.

Thirdly, it sees God so as to appreciate Him everywhere. God is to its eye not only great in everything, but He is Himself the greatness of everything. He is also the worth of everything, and the preciousness of all things. Hence, it puts such a price on God as to depreciate all else but Him; and in this is its delight; because the worthlessness of all created things lights up with such glorious splendour, the worth, the sole worth, the exceeding worth, of God and of what is God's.

Fourthly, it sees Him first everywhere. He is the first

object that strikes the eye, the first wherever the eye lights; or if it is not so, from some dimness in the eye itself, it seeks Him out and has no rest, and notices nothing else, until it has found Him. Then it takes the interpretation of all it sees from Him, consults first His will, seeks first His kingdom, legislates first for His interests; and until all this is done, it has taken neither height nor measure of what else may be in that place.

Fifthly, it sees Him last everywhere. It takes leave of no duty without seeing that God has had His due. It leaves no place without ascertaining how His interests are left there. When all else is consumed and exhausted, it still sees God in the empty temple. Through the veil of all other things, and after the distraction of their gay bewilderments, its pacific eye is still to the last on God, the end, the sum, the total, the result of all things, and His own infinite self besides.

Sixthly, it sees Him near everywhere. To the spirit of adoration God is always at hand. God touches it, holds it up, and lets it lean upon Him. It has always ready means of glorifying God; passing work, present work, the opened lip, the falling eye, the outstretched hand, all can glorify God instantaneously and continuously; because He is close by always. No time is spent in searching, nor labour lost in calculating. The little details of hourly privacy, they are all sacraments, all real presences; for God is in them all; and there is only one species under which adoration never sees Him, and that is as some object very far off.

Seventhly, it sees Him interfering everywhere. God is no idol or image to it: no convenient passive object of external reverence, to which it can bow or kneel, and then pass on and do its own will and follow its own way. Prayer at stated times, and incense morn and eve, these, if these only, are a mockery in the sight of adoration. To its eye

God's dominion is the substance and the entity of all things that exist. Consequently its eye is purged to see Him interfering everywhere, making claims and asserting rights every hour, laying His Hand on all things and stamping His mark upon all things, and insisting all day long, that at least in heart and attitude men should do public homage to Him for the usufruct of the very air they breathe and the very blood they live by. Adoration knows nothing of an otiose Providence: in its esteem the dignity of God and the lovingness of God lie in these momentary interferences; and it is looking ever to God, as the child looks to his father where two paths diverge, and it waits for His Hand, softly, and to all but watchful love imperceptibly, to turn it into the way He would have it go. These are the seven visions of God. Blessed is the gifted seer who gazes on them uncloudedly his whole life long! His ways shall be in security, and his heart in heavenly peace!

Now let us look out into the world, and see how far it looks like a society of creatures living, and consciously living, under the eye of their Creator, His will their rule, His beauty their loadstone, His glory their reward, His praise and blame their measure of right and wrong. God's glory, it must be remembered, is in the continuity and the universality of His interference; and the worship of His creatures is the recognition of His right to interfere. What idle words these seem! What is there in the world at all answering to them? How far is the conduct of men in any way a mirror of the One Living Being in Three Divine Persons? Literature is the flower and beauty of human intellect; and what is God to literature but an ornament at best? There is beauty in art, pathos in drama, sublimity in poetry and admiration in history, which are not after His laws, nay, are what He expressly disallows. God's place in literature is æsthetical, scenic, theatrical, and

nothing more. Philosophy allows for Him as an element of consideration and calculation in His own world, and more often as a disturbing force than otherwise. He is a difficulty which has to be dealt with, an objection which has to be answered: and alas! philosophy has felt more or less irritability in meeting both the difficulty and the objection. Science is occupied upon Him. But it ignores His personality, His life, His character. It deals with Him as a code of legislation, as an ancient manuscript, or a disinterred megatherium. It manipulates Him as a thing, a cause, or a power that has strewn the subterraneans of creation with manifestations of design.

Politics have their own way of looking at Him. To them He is a fellow power, to be feared for the brute force it has in it or the wily diplomacy, to be dreaded one while as barbarian and another while as insinuating and astute. He is a state far off, who has hardly a right to come into the horizon of politics or to meddle with the nicely adjusted balance of power, an oriental shah, very grand and very worshipful, but with whom it does not appear that we have any very direct concern, except an occasional interchange of gifts to our own advantage. Politics recognize of Him so much as this, that, existing and being a power, He has a right to be consulted when He has a right to be interested. But it does not appear that that is of very frequent occurrence. Society at large regards Him as a stately topic of misty consultation and convenient bounty to its friends. and as an affair of exquisite police to its enemies. He is a more or less indistinct machine of rewards and punishments, by no means adequate to the whole work of government and order, but on the whole trustworthy and perhaps indispensable. This is the world's view of God, its five visions of its Omnipotent and Life-giving Creator!

But how does our own spiritual life stand the comparison

with those seven visions of Catholic adoration? I am not speaking of our unforgetfulness of God, but of our very recognition of Him. Is it not wanting in fear, in reverence, in silence, in amazement, in abjection, and because in these things, therefore in love also, and righteous intimacy, and affectionate delight? . . .

Such is the delight and glory of fearing God that we might almost say that fear is the depth of love. The practical question for ourselves is to consider how far it is the characteristic of our relations with God, how far the spirit of adoration is our spirit, patient, expansive, submissive, profound, intelligent, penetrating, clear of sight, mature in judgment, eloquent in silence, dignified in humility, rejoicing in abasement. Adoration is the supernatural leaven of the creature. Nothing must escape it, nothing refuse it entrance. There is not a faculty but must be steeped in it, not a power but must be tempered in it, not a sentiment but must be beautified by it, not an act but must be animated with it. There is not a recess in our complex nature which must not be visited, searched, and purified with this celestial fire. Nay, it has its proper office even to our flesh. "Pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear," says the Psalmist; "for I am afraid of Thy judgments"; and when the word of God in the deep night reached the ears of Eliphaz "by stealth" and he received "the veins of His whisper, fear seized upon him and trembling, and all his bones were affrighted and the hair of his flesh stood up."

This spirit of adoration should be displayed in understanding, in feeling, in action, in love. The whole attitude of our mind should be full of reverence. In study, in thought, in argument, in persuasion, in reproof, when we speak and when we listen, our understanding should be as it were on the look out for God, vigilant to receive truth,

jealous to defend it, quick to perceive the hearing of opinions and judgments upon His glory. For if a man handles the commonest subject, and the name of God be not so much as mentioned, still it is all full of God, tingles with God, breathes of God, shines with God, is fragrant of God. A mind ever brooding on God, saturated with the thought of God, and to whose reasonings God is the swift conclusion of all premises, has a science of its own, and is a power on earth to which neither rank nor genius may compare. To exercise adoration in our feelings, our instincts must be so trained, so pliant and subtle in the hands of grace, that they become full of ready and occult sympathies with God. They must feel Him before He comes, and prophesy of Him when He is yet unseen. They must like and dislike, unerringly, they know not why, and yet the future will show that God's glory was concerned, and that they judged as love and truth and clear light would have had them judge.

Our actions also must be so many lovely-faced kneeling statues, with their hands clasped and their eyes upturned to heaven, full of self-oblivion and beautiful adoration. Every action of a man, whose mind is prayer and his feelings worship, is itself a divine work of art exceedingly lovely, far before frieze of temple or old Attic sculpture, a study more deeply imbued with the very essence of beauty than all the hallowed remnants of fascinating antiquity. But not mind and feeling and action only must be steeped in adoration, but love itself must be chastened in its selfrebuking fires. As humility is to zeal, so is fear to love. We must so fear that love will reach to highest heaven, and we must so love that fear must be a necessity of our love's life. The very thrills of love must be indistinguishable from the tremblings of fear. When we are startled with love's delightful boldness, when it is hard to believe that so great a God can love so tenderly, when it is a relief

to love to hide itself in the exaggerations of humility, when with a heart bursting with tearful hope that He will not hear our prayers, we cry out with Peter to his Master, "Depart from me, O Lord! for I am a sinful man,"—then is our love safe, then is it pure, then is it holy, then is it full of rest, and a foretaste of the eternal sabbath of the people of God.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 200-204, 205-207.

CXXVII

THANKSGIVING

If we had to name any one thing which seems unaccountably to have fallen out of most men's practical religion altogether, it would be the duty of thanksgiving. It is not easy to exaggerate the common neglect of this duty. There is little enough of prayer; but there is still less thanksgiving. For every million of Paters and Aves, which rise up from the earth to avert evils or to ask graces, how many do you suppose follow after in thanksgiving for the evils averted or the graces given? Alas! it is not hard to find the reason of this. Our own interests drive us obviously to prayer; but it is love alone which leads to thanksgiving. A man, who only wants to avoid hell, knows that he must pray; he has no such strong instinct impelling him to thanksgiving. It is the old story. Never did prayer come more from the heart than the piteous cry of those ten lepers who beheld Jesus entering into a town. Their desire to be heard made them courteous and considerate. They stood afar off, lest He should be angry if they with their foul disease came too near Him. Alas! they did not truly know that dear Lord, nor how He had lowered Himself to be counted as a leper for the sons of

men. They lifted up their voice saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When the miracle was wrought, the nine went on in selfish joy to show themselves to the priest; but one, only one, and he an outcast Samaritan, when he saw that he was made clean, went back, with a loud voice glorifying God, and he fell on his face before our Saviour's feet, giving thanks. Even the Sacred Heart of Jesus was distressed, and as it were astonished, and He said, "Were not ten made clean? and where are the nine? There is no one found to return and give glory to God, but this stranger!" How many a time have we not caused the same sad surprise to the Sacred Heart!—"All for Jesus," 208, 209.

CXXVIII

GRATITUDE

Going with modern habits of mind to the perusal of the lives of the saints, it seems almost strange to find gratitude, what we might nearly call the old heathen virtue of gratitude, so prominent a characteristic of the saints. It is one of the marks peculiar to all the saints, but more especially to the founders of religious orders and congregations. They seem to exaggerate the little benefits they have received, and to make as much of them as if they never could pay them off. St. Philip Neri had a marvellously long memory for the most trivial kindnesses. St. Ignatius appears sometimes quite absorbed in them, and passes on the obligations as heirlooms to future generations of his order. The treatment of patrons and founders in the middle ages, and the courteous observances of the Church towards them even at solemn times and in sacred places, is a manifestation of the same instinct of sanctity, and is of course closely connected with the spirit of thanksgiving. This is not our way now. A change has come over us which betokens something wrong, whatever it may be.

Perhaps we do less for each other than we used to. Earlier times and simpler forms of society may, like the beginning of colonies, have excelled in other virtues more than we. But this much is plain, that we take benefits far too much as matters of course, and that we lose with God in consequence. We are so beset with the notion of our own rights, the monomania of our times, that it actually disturbs and perplexes our relations with God, and confuses our theology. We have so many rights defined and undefined, and in this country, as an unpopular minority, we fight so disproportionately for them, that we come to look on almost everything which happens to us as a right, or as an attack upon our rights. We see this in others, even if we are blind to it in ourselves. We complain again and again that the poor take alms, as if they were rights, not favours. Now if Catholic theology be true, alms are much nearer rights, especially to the very poor, than the favours we receive and count as due to us, and as if we were beholden to nothing for them but our own rank and worth. In these days we canonize self-help as the queen of virtues instead of charity, and this poisons the very fountains of our moral philosophy, and distorts our notions of duty.

Then, again, the different classes of society are so coldly divided off one from another, not so much blood from wealth, as wealth from mediocrity, and mediocrity from poverty, that it is as if civilization were resolving itself back again into an institution of castes, a state almost worse than promiscuous savagery. Furthermore, we do good to each other, either through central associations from which the individual kindness is evaporated and lost,

or on so small and niggardly a scale, that there is no scope for a vigorous growth of gratitude.

However, from whatever cause, gratitude is not a modern virtue: and the absence of it is one of those modern vices against which we must be especially on our guard when we are trying to train our souls on the model of Catholic sanctity. To some it may appear strange that I should make so much of it and treat it as a separate flower of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. But the lack of it is a grievous fault, and comes of a most unholy temper. If a man were shown me who had a long memory for little kindnesses, who never seemed out of debt in his affections. who exaggerated his obligations to others, kept anniversaries of them, and repaid them twenty times over, I should be more struck with the likelihood of his turning out a saint, than if I heard that he disciplined himself to blood daily, slept on the bare boards, enjoyed the prayer of quiet, had been scourged by devils, and had seen our Blessed Lady. Alas! we forget the ten lepers, and the nine that were ungrateful: or in these days of self-praise and selfimportance, we are like Ezechias, when God had given him a sign, "he did not render again according to the benefits which he had received; for his heart was lifted up."

But let us look more closely into the importance of gratitude in the spiritual life. God's mercy is the great feature of the two kingdoms of nature and of grace. Now gratitude is man's answer to God's mercy; and just as charity to our neighbour is the best test of our real love of God, so gratitude to our neighbour for his kindness to us is a clearer proof of a grateful disposition, than gratitude to God, which is mixed up with so many other cogent considerations. If we realize everything as coming from God, then these benefits are from Him; and they come from Him in the most beautiful and touching way, through

the mediation of our brother's human heart inspired by grace. So that every kindness we receive is a little copy of the Incarnation, a miniature of that attractive mystery. . . .

Lastly, it is the proper and normal state of a holy creature to perfect himself under the continual feeling of obligations which he never can repay. This is the relation between the Creator and himself. Meanwhile, to all the evil and baser parts of our nature it is a real mortification to have the sense of obligation pressing upon us. It is the sign of a vulgar man that he cannot bear to be under an obligation. Thus in both ways the sense of obligation is a great part of sanctity. A grateful man cannot be a bad man; and it were a sad thing indeed, if either in the practice or the esteem of this virtue the heathen should surpass the disciples of that grateful Master who, to the end of time and in the busy pageant of the judgment, will remember and repay the cup of cold water given in His Name.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 207-210, 211, 212.

CXXIX

THE MYSTERY OF PRAYER

THERE are many things which go to make up a true account of prayer. First, we must consider who we are who pray. None could have a more ignoble origin. We were created out of nothing, and we came into the world with the guilt and shame of sin already on our souls, and the burden of a hideous penalty which eternal lamentation never could remit. To this our original disgrace we have added all manner of guilt and shame, of treason and rebellion, of irritability and disrespect of our own. There are no words which would exaggerate our malice, no description which

could convey a fair idea of our helpless ignorance. Everything about us was little to begin with, and we have made it immeasurably less. It is hard to conceive ourselves worse than we are; so much so that it is necessary to make it a duty to be patient and forbearing with ourselves quite as much as with others. Then, next we must consider who it is to whom we pray. The infinitely blessed Majesty of God, than which nothing can be conceived more good, more holy, more pure, more august, more adorable, more compassionate, more incomprehensible, or more unutterable. The very thought of God takes away our breath. He is Three living Persons. We live, and move, and breathe in Him. He can do what He wills with us. He is no further bound to us than He has graciously and piteously chosen to bind Himself. He knows everything without our telling Him or asking Him. Yet it is to Him we pray. Next, let us think where it is we pray. Whether it be a consecrated place or not, it is in God Himself. We are in the midst of Him, as fishes are in the sea. His immensity is our temple. His ear lies close upon our lips. It touches them. We do not feel it; if we did we should die. It is always listening. Thoughts speak to it as loudly as words; sufferings even louder than words. His ear is never taken away. We sigh into it even while we sleep and dream.

Next, let us ask, whence comes the value of our prayers? They are fleeting words; fugitive petitions. There is nought in us to give ground for a hearing, except the very excess of our unworthiness, and, therefore, the extremity of our need. Else, why should our prayers be in the Creator's ear more than the roaring of a lion, or the querulous complaining of the plover, or the cry of the suffering beast run down by the hunters? Their value comes principally from this—that God Himself has vouch-safed to become man, has lain out upon the inclement

mountains, and spent the night in prayer. He mixes us up with Himself; makes our cause His, His interests ours, and we become one with Him. So by a mysterious communion the worth of His prayers runs into our prayers, the wealth of His enriches the poverty of ours, the infinity of His touches, raises, and magnifies the wretchedness of ours. So that when we pray, it is not we who pray, but He who prays. We speak into our Heavenly Father's ear, and it is not our voice, but the voice of Jesus, like His Mother's voice, that God vouchsafes to hear. Or rather, the Eternal vouchsafes to be like Isaac in his blind old age. His younger son kneels before Him for His blessing, with licence to play his elder brother's part. "The voice indeed is the voice of Jacob," and it is not he whom I will bless, "but the hands are the hands of Esau," roughened with the toil of the world's redemption. He says with Isaac: "Come near Me, and give Me a kiss, My son"; and immediately, as He smells the fragrant smell of His garments, for it is of a truth the stole of Christ, "blessing him, He says: Behold the smell of My son is as the smell of a plentiful field"; and so He filleth him with blessings.

Neither is this an end of the inventions of His paternal love. For, we must next inquire with whom it is we pray. Never alone; of this we are sure, whenever we rightly pray. There is One dwelling in us who is co-equal, coeternal God, proceeding from the Father and the Son. He forms the word in our hearts, and then puts music in our cry, when we exclaim, "Abba, Father!" He is our "access to the Father." He "strengthens us with might unto the inward man." He makes us "speak to ourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual canticles, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God

and the Father." He is the Spirit in whom "we pray at all times, by all prayer and supplication, and watch in the same, with all instance and supplication for all the saints." He is the Spirit "who helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings; and He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what the Spirit desireth." Does not the mystery of prayer deepen and deepen upon us?

Next, look at the incredible ease of prayer. Every time, place, posture is fitting; for there is no time, place, or posture, in and by which we cannot reverently confess the Presence of God. Talent is not needed. Eloquence is out of place. Dignity is no recommendation. Our want is our eloquence, our misery our recommendation. Thought is quick as lightning, and quick as lightning can it multiply effectual prayer. Actions can pray; sufferings can pray. There need no ceremonies; there are no rubrics to keep. The whole function is expressed in a word; it is simply this, —the child at his father's knee, his words stumbling over each other from very earnestness, and his wistful face pleading better than his hardly intelligible prayer.

Then consider the efficacy of prayer. We have only to pray for lawful things, to pray for them often and perseveringly, and to believe we shall receive them, and receive them too, not according to the poverty of our foolish intentions, but according to the riches, and wisdom, and munificence of God; and it is an infallible truth that we shall receive them. God is at our disposal. He allows us this almost unbounded influence over Him, not once or twice, not merely on feasts or great occasions, but all our lives long. Are there any of the mysteries of grace sweeter than this? We read of one of the saints, that, so availing were her prayers supposed to be, people came from all

quarters to beg her to recommend their necessities to God. She, meanwhile, heard them and forgot them. She was immersed in contemplation, saw only the Divine Attributes, and had no thought but for the Lover of her soul. She was amazed, then, when crowds came continually to thank her for the answers that had come to her prayers on their behalf, and in an ecstasy she spoke her wonder in the ear of Jesus. "Daughter," replied our dearest Lord, "your will is always and only to do My will, and I will never let you vanquish Me in love; and, therefore, My will is to do your will, even when you have forgotten that you ever willed it." See what manner of Lord He is with whom we have to do!

Then, last of all, it is not for ourselves alone He lets us pray, but for others also. Nay, He expressly commands us to make intercessory prayer. Through His apostle He speaks with that positive and unusual form, "I desire first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings, be made by men" (1 Tim. ii. 1.) And in the passage quoted above from the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, when the apostle says, "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what the Spirit desireth;" he adds, "because he asketh for the saints according to God." Thus, the inestimable privilege, the mysterious gift of prayer, is given to us not merely for our own necessities, but that we may use it for the temporal and spiritual good of others. How strict an account shall we have to render for so great a favour, and how careful we should be that this power should not be entrusted to us in vain! Whatever other talents God may not have given to us, this one, without doubt, He has given to us. There is no distinction of persons. Young and old, rich and poor, learned and simple, priest and lay, religious and secular, we are all of us bound to the practice of intercessory prayer. Woe unto us if we

hide our talent, or venture to return it to our Judge at the last unfruitful. Let each one examine himself and see what time he has given hitherto to this devotion, and whether the past is in this respect altogether what he would have it be. To pray always is a hard precept, and one we can only come to by time and habit, as well as by gift and grace. But the thing is to find that the older we grow the more we pray, and that the more we pray the more our prayer takes the line of intercession for the souls of others.

Perhaps, never while we are on earth shall we realize the heavenly might of prayer, nor the exceeding riches of that treasure which now, alas! we make so light of, seeing not how thereby God's glory is so much within our power. What might we not do by prayer! What might we not do in every remotest corner of the earth, in the cells of purgatory, and in the open courts of heaven! Yet the times are against prayer: the spirit of the age is against it; the habits of our countrymen are against it. Oh, for faith in prayer! for only faith in prayer! for faith in simple prayer! and the interests of Jesus shall spread like a beneficent conquest all over the world, and the glory of God shall beautifully cover the earth as the abounding waters cover the bed of the sea, and the choirs of redeemed souls shall multiply and multiply, till the Good Shepherd should be, were it any other than He, overladen with the sheaves of His prolific Passion! - "All for Jesus," 97-102.

CXXX

THE POWER OF PRAYER

The universal grace of prayer is one of the sweetest, as well as the fullest, expressions of the doctrine of the easiness

of salvation. But can prayer mean that God will give up His own will, and accommodate it to ours? "Ask, and you shall have; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The fervent prayer of a just man is of great avail. Intellectually speaking, it is very hard to believe in prayer; but let us spend but one week in the real earnest service of God and the exercise of a spiritual life, and the fact, and far more than we ever surmised to be the fact, will lie before us bright beyond the brilliance of any human demonstrations. All experience concurs with God's written word to tell us that the immutable is changed by prayer. The saints turn aside the great universal laws of nature by the blow of an ejaculation. Even the unexpressed will of a soul in union with God is a power with the omnipotent Creator, and looks like what it cannot be, a limit to His liberty. And this is always in our reach, instant, lightning-like, peremptory, and efficacious; and on its way to heaven it unites itself with the prayer of Jesus upon earth, with the intercessions of Mary, with the appeals of all the saints, and the earnest outcries and entreaties of the wide militant Church on earth, and thus like a beautiful storm of supplication, like a loud-voiced litany of all creation, it breaks round the throne of God with majestic power, and the echo is heard in our hearts almost before the inward prayer is breathed, and the sounds of blustering temptation are hushed within, and the big drops of the impetuous rain of grace are falling thick and fast upon us. It will be one of the joys of heaven to learn the secret of the power of prayer. But now it is a great abyss to the rocky edge of which we climb and look over, and all is sonorous darkness, and we turn giddy, and recover not our senses until we kneel down and adore the one only supreme, infinitely lovely, and unspeakably adorable will of God .-"The Creator and the Creature," 281, 282.

CXXXI

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

The interests of Look at the Church militant on earth. Jesus are rich and plentiful enough here. There are things to be done, and things to be left undone. Hearts to be persuaded, and hearts to be dissuaded. There is so much to do, the puzzle is where to begin, and what to do first. Men who do not love Jesus are to be made to love Him, and men who love Him to love Him a great deal more. Each of us might take one department, and we should find more work to be done in it than we can get through in our best of times. There are so many people in their agony, and dying every minute all over the world. In what danger the very dearest interests of Jesus are at their dying beds! Satan is hard at work; temptations drive in thicker than flakes in a snowstorm; and whose wins this battle. Jesus or the devil, is so far conqueror for ever; for there is no fighting it over again. There are Catholics who have not been near the Sacraments for years, and there are saints whose half-century of merits and heroic love is positively in peril of being lost; they only want one thing, and let them suffer ever so much they cannot merit it, and that is final perseverance. There are heretics who never suspected they were in heresy, and heretics in bad faith, who have told falsehoods about the Church, and blasphemed the Mother of God. There are Jews descended from those who crucified our Lord, and there are Mahometans who are the masters of Jerusalem. There are Hottentots who worship loathsome images, and there are American Indians, who have no higher thought than to hunt for all eternity, their merits proportioned to the number of their murders. There are men whom the unthawing snows whiten, and men whom

the fierce heats of the south scorch, on the mountain-tops, in the deep valleys, in the city and in the wilderness, on the land and on the sea, in the dungeon and in the palace; all dying, many each minute in the most frightful unpreparedness that can be conceived; and Jesus died for every one of them, as exclusively as if there had been nobody else to die for, and He is ready this moment to come down and die for each one again, if it were needed. Go all through His long Passion, mark His steps, His tears, His drops of blood; count the thorns, the blows, the spittings, the falls; fathom the interior depths of the shame and shrinking, the torture and the sickness of His Sacred Heart; and it was all for that poor Indian, dying far away this hour beneath the shadow of the Andes; and if he dies and is not saved, it will have been in vain. This is but one department of the interests of Jesus, men in their last agony; and St. Camillus was raised up to found an order expressly for them. What might we not say of souls in mortal sin, of heretics and infidels, of criminals in prison, of persons under calumny, of others in scruples or temptations? We should never have done if we described all the interests of Jesus upon earth. . . .

There is not a public-house, or a gin-palace, not a theatre or a casino, not a ball-room or a concert, not a public meeting or a parliament, not a shop or a wharf, not a fair, a race-course, or a market, not a carriage or a ship, not a school or a church, where His interests are not in danger at all hours, and where He is not calling on us to help Him. The Church on earth is the fighting part of the Church: no wonder there is so much to do, and so little time to do it in. There is not a thing which has not two sides, and one side belongs to Jesus, and the other side is against Him. The devil has other interests besides sheer sin. He can fight against Jesus with low views almost as successfully

as with mortal sins. The slow poison of souls sometimes does his work better than the quick. See, then, the multiplicity, the ubiquity, the urgency, of the interests of Jesus.—"All for Jesus," 10, 11, 13.

CXXXII

THE JOY OF THE LORD

It is difficult to have the better of our Lord in the strife of liberality and love. Of all the fruits of the Holy Ghost none seems more desirable, because none is less earthly or more heavenly, than joy; and it is just this fruit which our Blessed Lord bestows on such as devote themselves to intercession. This is very observable. There is a certain sunniness and light-heartedness about them for which there seems no ordinary cause, except that it is like the sweet lightening of the spirit which comes after a kind and unselfish action. This may partly be the reason. But there is another also. We see not the fruit of our intercession; the spirit of prayer escapes out upon the earth, and is everywhere like the hidden omnipresence of God. It is out of our sight. Nay, it is not like a series of distinguishable works. We hardly remember how much intercession we have made. Who can count the sighs he has sent up to God, or the wishes without words which the tongue of his heart has told into the ear of Jesus? So, from the fruit being hidden, vain-glory attaches to it less than to almost any other devotion. However this may be, sweetness and consolation, submissively desired, are beyond all doubt great helps to holiness; and whosoever desires to joy in God, and to abound in all joy and consolation in the Lord, to be gay and prompt in serving Jesus, to be patient with life because of the desire of death, and to be equable in all things, which is not far from being holy in all things, let him throw away himself and his own ends, and, wedding the dear interests of Jesus and of souls, betake himself to intercession, as if it were his trade, or he had as much to do with it as his Guardian Angel has to do with him. Joy is the especial recompense of intercession. It is part of His joy, who rejoices in the harvest of His Passion. What stirs in our hearts has come to us from His. It was first in His, before it was in ours, and an angel's presence would be less desirable than is that little taste of the Redeemer's joy.—"A for Jesus," 126, 127.

CXXXIII

A LIFE OF PRAYER

THE spiritual life is quite a cognizably distinct thing from the worldly life; and the difference comes from prayer. When grace lovingly drives a man to give himself up to prayer, he gets into the power of prayer, and prayer makes a new man of him; and so completely does he find that his life is prayer, that at last he prays always. His life itself becomes one unbroken prayer. Unbroken, because it does not altogether nor so much reside in methods of mental or forms of vocal prayer; but it is an attitude of heart by which all his actions and sufferings become living prayers.

The life of prayer, therefore, which is the badge of the supernatural man, is the praying always. But what is it to pray always? What did our Lord mean by it? To pray always is always to feel the sweet urgency of prayer, and to hunger after it. Grace is palpably felt and touched in prayer; hence, it strengthens our faith and inflames our love. The peculiar trial of hard work is that it keeps us so much from prayer, and takes away the flower of our strength

before we have time for prayer, and physical strength is very needful for praying well. In consequence of this attraction we acquire habits of prayer by having set times for it, whether mental or vocal. Not that a mere habit of praying will make any one a man of prayer. But God will not send His fire, if we do not first lay the sacrifice in order. We must also practise ejaculatory prayer, and have certain fixed ejaculations, as well as make frequent spontaneous aspirations to heaven during the day at will, and out of the fervid abundance of our hearts. Besides this, there is a certain gravitation of the mind to God in a prayerful way, which · comes from love and from the practice of the divine presence, and which ranges from intercession to thanksgiving, and from thanksgiving to praise, and from praise to petition, according as the moods of our mind change, and with hardly any trouble or any conscious process. To pray always is, furthermore, to renew frequently our acts of pure intention for the glory of God, and thus to animate with the life of prayer our actions, conversations, studies, and sufferings.

This is to pray always: and see what comes of it! Into what a supernatural state it throws a man! He lives in a different world from other men. Different dwellers are round about him, and are his familiars, God, Jesus, Mary, angels, and saints. They are the undercurrent of his mind, and often preside over the very expression of his thoughts. He has not the same interests, hopes, and aims as other men. When he wishes to do anything, he goes to work in a different way from others, and he tests his success differently. Indeed, in nothing is he so remote from men of the world as in his tests of success, which are wholly supernatural and full of the unearthly spirit of the Incarnation. His views of the world are strange, although they are definite and clear, because somehow he sees the world confusedly through the vision of the Church; and he judges of

the relations and distances of things according as they group around the central faith. His affections become shifted, so that he is regarded even by those near him, as an impassible man, and by those further off as a cold heart that is destitute of natural affections and the keen sympathies of kindred. Moreover, the temper of repose which prayer breeds is unfavourable to success and advancement in a worldly sense, because it is unfavourable to the eager desire and restless pursuit of them.

This influence of prayer comes out in a man's opinions and judgments of men, measures, and things. It is heard in his language. It is seen in his tranquillity. It is recognized in his dealings with others, and is the ruling principle of his occasional apparent want of sympathy with others. Such is a man whose faculties, affections, and in some degree even his senses, have been mastered by the spirit of prayer. We should expect it would win men by his gracefulness, like an angel's presence. But it is not so, because its beauty requires a spiritual discernment. To the eyes of the world such a man has all the strangeness and awkwardness of a foreigner, which in sober truth he is. Yet such a man is striking to others in after-thought, as the Blessed Sacrament so often is to Protestants, when they have come unawares into His presence and gone again. It is the way of God, and of the things of God, to be striking in after-thought. —"Growth in Holiness." 217-219.

CXXXIV

CONFIDENCE IN GOD

What has God done, that His creatures do not trust Him? We cannot trust ourselves, neither can we do without trusting. We cannot hang suspended in space, from nothing and over nothing. It is plain we cannot trust each other.

Confidence in God is meant to be the creature's life. Without it, we had better disbelieve whatever we do not see, while we can do no better than acknowledge that all we see is a burdensome enigma. But how is life to be lived without confidence in God? We came out of His hand. It is true He has in some sense loosened His hold upon us, but it is only for a while. He will take us up again. We came from Him. We are going back to Him. There are but two eternal homes. They are both the work of His justice. One or other of them is inevitable. But one of them is rather an endless end than a home. We cannot fly from Him. We cannot hide from Him. What shall we do, if we cannot trust Him?

Yet confidence in God is far from common, and an adequate confidence most rare. It would be a terrible thing to say that the worship of God was rare among men; yet confidence is the only real worship. Our confidence is our religion. It is the sweetness of life. It is worth our while to have lived, if it were only to have known the delight of trusting in God. But it is not our joy only. It is our absolute necessity, and therefore belongs to the lowest of us. It is our only true perfection, and therefore belongs to the highest of us. Let us try to bring this home to ourselves. It is one of those commonplace things, which are of the greatest importance, and yet need continual repetition. When we look even at good men, we see that what they want is confidence in God. Bishops want it, priests want it, religious want it. It is the want in the piety of almost every one. Our very confidence in God is wanting in confidence. Yet, if confidence is the only true worship, things must be very far from being what they ought to be, even with the servants of God. . . .

Few persons are aware of the extent of their own deficiency in this respect. Most persons take the matter so completely for granted, that they do not suspect themselves, and therefore do not examine themselves on the subject. There is something so monstrous in not trusting God, that we should have thought it must be a rare thing among good people. But experience teaches very differently. Many aim at perfection, and few attain it. In almost every case the reason of the failure is the want of confidence in God. Many persons live for years always intending to begin to form habits of prayer, or habits of particular examination of conscience, and never really begin either the one or the other. The real cause of this procrastination is want of confidence in God. Men try to give up habits of sin, and either intermit their efforts, or abandon them entirely, through want of confidence in God. When a man is scrupulous, it is mostly from want of confidence in God. Our knowledge of our own misery, which makes us brave when we have confidence in God, makes us cowardly and mean-spirited when we are destitute of that confidence. Many persons take up supernatural views of things as intellectual convictions; and yet, when they are thrown into circumstances which as it were compel the acting on these principles, we behold not a vestige of them in their conduct. This also is a result of want of confidence in God. really, far more than we believe, look at religion, at prayer, and at grace, as if the whole was a lottery, or something like it. A real believing prayer is by no means common. This is probably the reason why such an immensity of prayer seems unanswered. Many men content themselves with a mere indeterminate hope, which can never carry heaven by storm as confidence does. Let us look into ourselves, and see if we really have true and solid confidence in God. Many remain beginners all their lives, because they have not confidence in God.—"Spiritual Conferences," 275, 276, 278, 279.

CXXXV

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST

In devotion we have to receive as well as give; to receive more than we give. In truth, from first to last it rather seems to be mostly receiving and little giving. The exercise of devotion finds its chief theatre in prayer; and inspirations are God's side of prayer. We must not always be speaking, we must be listening also. We must pause from time to time, and make all quiet in our hearts, that we may not lose the heavenly whispers that come floating there. I am not speaking now of extraordinary mystical colloquies, but of what will pass in the souls of all recollected men at prayer. As soon, says St. Gregory, as an inspiration touches our soul, it elevates it above itself, represses the thoughts of temporal things, and quickens the desire of things eternal, so that it is delighted with heavenly things only, and weary of earthly; and such a height of perfection does it communicate to the soul, that it likens it to the Holy Ghost; for, as Scripture says, "what is born of the Spirit is spirit." These inspirations are some of the actual impulses of the Holy Ghost, of which I spoke before; and they may be called the very necessaries of life to those who are aiming at perfection. They are wanting them nearly all the day long; for, as it is by habitual and actual grace that we live the life of grace, obeying the commandments of God and the precepts of the Church, so it is by the habitual gifts of the Holy Ghost and His actual impulses and inspirations, superadded to grace, that we live the lives of perfect men and of ascetics who are training for perfection. These inspirations are not chance things, or rare, or what are technically called spiritual favours. We must beware of confounding them with these. They are our daily bread. They are to perfection what grace is to virtue. They flow into us, whether we hear and feel them or not, in an almost unintermitting stream. Before we gave ourselves up to God without reserve we had them frequently, more frequently than careless sinners, who nevertheless have them very often in right of their baptism; but now they flow into us in an almost unintermitting stream. One great mystical theologian calls the gifts of the Holy Ghost the seven sails of the soul in which it catches the various breezes of inspiration, and so navigates the sea of perfection.—"Growth in Holiness," 377, 378.

CXXXVI

THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY GHOST

Was there ever any such fertility as that of the Holy Ghost? The leaves of the trees, the blades of the grass, the matted entanglement of tropical herbs in the moist forest, the countless shoals of the living inhabitants of ocean, the swarms of insects which in hot regions blacken the sun for miles as if they were sand-storms,—these are but types of the fecundity of the Holy Ghost in the operations of grace. We never can do justice to the magnitude of the world of angels. The poor child, who has no notion of money but in pence, would be bewildered if he were called upon to deal with gold, and to count his gold by millions. So we in earthly things are accustomed to dimensions, and to numbers, on so dwarfish a scale, that even our exaggerations will not raise our ideas to the true magnitudes and multitudes of the world of angels. The countless myriads of individual spirits, the countless graces which are strewn all over the breadth of their capacious natures, the colossal size of those graces as compared with those of human souls, the inconceivable

rapidity, delicacy, and subtlety of the operations of grace in such gigantic intelligences and such fiery affections,—these considerations, if well weighed, may give us some idea of the fruitfulness of the most dear sanctifying Spirit. Every one of those graces was merited for the angels by the Precious Blood. Converting grace they never had, for they never needed a conversion; and to those who fell no conversion was allowed. If we think also of the multitude of souls, the sum of successive generations from Adam to the uncertain Doom, if we try to bring before ourselves the variety of vocations in the world, the strictly peculiar needs of each single soul and the distinctive characteristic shape of the holiness of each single soul, then the multiplicity of the processes of grace prolonged perhaps over half a century or more, we shall see that the arithmetic of even human graces is amazing. Through the instrumentality of the Precious Blood, the Holy Ghost is everywhere and always making all things productive of sanctity in some measure and degree. Sanctification may be called the production of heavenly beauty in the world. It is the filling of nature with the supernatural. It is the transforming of the human or angelic into the divine. It is the engraving of the image of God upon every piece and parcel of the rational creation. It is the brightening and the beautifying of creation. It is the empire of light stealing upon the realm of darkness, swiftly, slowly, variously, with beams and splendours, with transformations and effects, more marvellous than those of any lovely dawn upon the mountains and forests of the earth. It is the especial and appropriate office of the Holy Ghost, with the universal and invariable and inseparable agency of the Precious Blood. Thus, every process of Sanctification, while it is an outpouring of exquisite love upon creatures, is also a passage of mutual love between Jesus and the Holy Ghost. Our Lord's words in the Gospels indicate to us something of the unspeakable jealous love of the Sacred Humanity for the Eternal Spirit. Our dearest Saviour, whose very office and occupation it was to forgive sin, was unlike Himself when He excepted from this amnesty the sin against the Holy Ghost: unlike Himself, yet true to some depth of holiness and love within Himself. On the other hand, it was to be the office of the Paraclete to bring Jesus to mind, to fill the memory with the sweet words He had said, to keep the Thirty-Three Years alive on earth for ever, to be for ever testifying of Jesus, and for ever completing and adorning the work which He had come on earth to do.—" The Precious Blood," 99-101.

CXXXVII

SPECIAL DEVOTIONS

Any special drawing in devotion is a great gift from God. It is one of the most powerful of all the secret influences of the spiritual life. It is therefore of great importance to a man not to mistake or overlook such a heavenly attraction. Such a mistake is like a man missing his vocation. Every man doubtless has a vocation, so every spiritual man has a devotional attraction, or a succession of them. For a spiritual man is one who dwells inwardly in the supernatural world, amid God's mysteries and revealed grandeurs. He is not a mere tourist who is struck by the sublime or the picturesque of theology, and admires the scenery as a whole, and has not such a familiarity with it as to enable him to break it up into separate landscapes, nor time to brood tranquilly over any of them so as to have a rational predilection for them. He dwells in the world of theology. He is like one whose fixed abode is in grand scenery. He sees it in the

morning light and in the sunset's glow. He knows how it looks when the misty calm of summer noon is wafting fragrance over wood and water. He is familiar with it in the vicissitudes of storm and calm. When the distant mountains are hidden by summer's impenetrable rampart of green leaves before his window, he feels that they are there, and that winter's leafless woods will let them in upon his sight. He knows how the faces of the mountains change, according as the light strikes them in the front or from behind, and how a stranger, who has seen them in the morning, would in the evening, spite of all landmarks, be doubtful of their identity. He cannot help having preferences. Predilections are almost a necessity to him. Or at least he must honour, like a true poet, each coming season with an admiration which seems, if it only seems, to do injustice to the season that is past, like the souls who in devotion follow the calendar of the Church, and honour most the feast under whose shadow they are sitting. So it must be to those to whom the supernatural world is a genuine home. Their life is a life of loves, and therefore of predilections also.

All spiritual souls are thus haunted souls. They see sights which others do not see, and hear sounds which others do not hear. This haunting is to them their own secret prophecy of heaven. It would be sad to miss so choice a grace by inattention, sadder still to follow a fantastic delusion of earth instead of the heavenly reality. The soul cannot hear God unless it listens for Him, and listening is the devoutest attitude of a wise and loving soul. Yet they who listen hear many sounds which others do not hear, many sounds for which they themselves are never listening. There are false sounds on earth, which have a trick of heaven in them. They are like the phantom-bells that ring for vespers, as from viewless convents, in the wilderness of Zin,

Yet the Bedouin deems that, with his practised ear, he can discern their thin tolling from the real sounds of the sandy solitude. The avoiding of delusion is not the whole of safety in the spiritual life. When a man turns his entire life into a cautious self-defence against imposture, he is leading perhaps the falsest life a man can lead. There is more danger in missing a grace from God, than in mistaking an earthly beckoning for a divine. For in the last case purity of intention soon rectifies the error, while in the other the loss is for the most part irretrievable. Even in the natural life, and in the spiritual life much more, they are the most unfortunate of men, who linger behind their lot. They are like those who loiter behind the desert caravan. Straightway, as Marco Polo tells us, a shadowy voice calls them by their name, and allures them to one side of the route. They follow, and still it calls, and when they have wandered from the path, a mocking silence follows, more terrible than the deceiving voice. The wind of evening has lifted the light sands, and quietly effaced the marks of feet and camelhoofs upon the wilderness, as the breeze ruffles out the wakes of ships on the yielding deep, and smooths the water by its ruffling. They have missed their vocation. It is no use their living now. They might as well lie down and die. Such are they, who in the spiritual life linger behind their grace. They of all men are the most haunted by delusions, and have the least discernment by which to tell them from realities. A soul that has let grace outstrip it, will never see its caravan again. It may die with God; for God is in the wilderness; but faint indeed is the chance of its not dying in the wilderness. Let each man look well to see if he has not within himself a leading from God; and if he has, let him know that it is his one saving thing to follow it.

In the kingdom of grace, the law, which has the fewest exceptions, is the one which rules that supernatural things

shall graft themselves on natural stocks. Hence it is that a man's devotional attraction is for the most part congenial to his natural turn of mind. Now, it is with spiritual men as it is with poets. Some delight in quiet, modest scenes in woodland bowers, in tinkling brooks, in rivers that lapse so quietly, with their brims on the level of the meadows, that the sedge scarce twinkles in the stream, in cottages jasminemantled, in kine knee-deep in the cool shallow, in village spires scarce over-topping a coronal of ancient elms, in the fragrance of the bee-laden limes, and in all those evening sights and sounds which tell of weary labour set free and wending to its home, which is an allegory that bears a thousand gentle interpretations. Others delight in the misty plain, in the forest solitude, in the distant horizon of the steppe, in the solemnity of the overclouded fen, in vast outspread scenes of moonlit sea, or in the silence of deserted cities and neglected ruins. These are the images which recur in their works again and again, as if those aspects of nature were the entire expressions of their minds. There are some whose imagery is all from the tangled lives of men, and the many-sided aspects of human actions, poets who have no still life within their souls, except when they reach the intensest depths of passions, which at such depths are gestureless and mute. They can clothe in marvellous beauty the objects whose daily commonness most dishonours them. The streets of the city become beautiful in their word-pictures, and the trampling of a multitude makes music in their verse, while the familiar thoughts and things of their own day impart a livingness to their souls, full of nerve and of significance, yet dignified and beautified by the excellence of their art.

There are others who like to live in echoing thunderstorms, among the rifted crags of the hollow mountains, who go far out of the sound of suffering humanity, and are

dwellers with the eagles. The stun of the thundering avalanche, the black, mountainous, and shipless seas bursting on the iron-bound coast, the cloud-pageantry of magnificently appalling storms, the sobbing and moaning of the winds in purple unsunny glens, the overwhelming silence of the central desert, the creaking of the huge cordillera as the earthquake stretches its stiff limbs upon the rack, the unwitnessed volcanoes that wave their red torches over the silent ghastly whiteness of the creatureless south pole, as if they were earth's fiery banners hung out in space as she races onward, the terrific regions of tumultuous mountaintops with misty breaks between the ridges where humble sequestered vales might be, shapeless waving forms and throbbing silences, shadows in the gigantic gloom of unsunny caves, immense precipices that sleep for ever in shadows of their own, even when the brightest sun is shining,-these are images, expressed or unexpressed, which overcast the works of such minds, and are their genius, their inspiration, their native grandeur. It is in a world of these dread forms that their minds breathe most freely, or rather they breathe freely nowhere else but there. It is to these last that we may compare the souls, whose attraction in the spiritual life is to the Divine Perfections. Majestic deserts as they are to the bounded intelligence of man, yet some souls find better nurture there than in the verdant pastures lower down. The eagle chooses his dwelling with as faultless an instinct as the nightingale deep-hidden in its bush, or the robin trilling its winter song upon the window-sill. We must not call such souls ambitious. They have been lured thither by wiles of grace as gentle and as gradual, as those who have been drawn to the crib of Bethlehem.—" Bethlehem," 232-236.

CXXXVIII

OUR BLESSED LADY

Who is not full of joy when a feast of our Lady comes, those bright days that strew the year with stars? It is as if the Church called us to leave the noise and distraction of the world, and walk by the shores of some calm majestic lake, in whose unruffled and translucent depths are imaged the mountains of the Divine Perfections. We remember the various splendours of the angelic kingdom; and we remember how that, in the one first moment of her Immaculate Conception, the imperial Mother of God was adorned with greater graces and shone with greater merits than all the angels put together, were they to add their merits into one for a million years. If we do the sum of her grace and merits by the arithmetic of Suarez, for which that saintly theologian was thanked by Mary herself, how far beyond the expression of our figures has the sum advanced when fifteen years of moments, each moment with the full use of reason, each moment, even of slumber, meriting on a gigantic scale, are fully accomplished?

To our eyes she is almost lost in the light of grace. We can hardly make a picture of what she was like as a Jewish woman of royal birth. We may measure her grace by the marvel of her divine tranquillity under the visitation now about to come. The jubilant ocean of Uncreated Love rose like a cloud, and hung with His deluge of graces and gifts over the kneeling maiden. His angel went before Him, and He overshadowed the soul and body of Mary, while He waited for her sweet word. In that shadow no created eye could see her. Her word was hardly spoken, fleeting away on the silence of the swift night, but the Eternal Word was incarnate in her ever-blessed bosom. What is Mary

now, compared with what she was before? Like an inland sea girt round with the mountains of God; or rather herself compassing the Incomprehensible and Illimitable, fifteen years older than the Eternal, and the Eternal's Mother. Why do you weep, Christian soul? It is because there is no prayer and no thanksgiving but tears, when we think of the Incarnation. Each mystery of Jesus and Mary is so touching, that no tale of earthly joy or woe is half so pathetic; but the tenderest and most overwhelming of all is the unspeakable mystery of the Incarnation itself. The Annunciation is the hardest feast in the year to keep as it should be kept.

Now for our arithmetic again. We have the sum of three-and-thirty years to do, and such years? We have Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth, the Sea of Tiberias, the mountain and the plain, Jerusalem, Bethany, Olivet, and Calvary, to add together and cast up. When Jesus ascended into heaven, Mary had become our Mother as well as His; and what can be said of her accumulated graces and merits, except that it was a miracle she still remained the same Mary, and a lowly dweller upon earth, so unutterable had been the torrent-like influxes of all the communicable excellences of God, which had poured into her soul and mind and flesh for now well-nigh half a century of human years. There was nothing like her among creatures. She herself was like nothing but the Most Holy Trinity, who is virginal and yet prolific. She has need now to say to our admiring love, what Jesus said to the disciples after His Resurrection: "Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and blood, as ye see me have!" Yes! there are the beatings of her Immaculate Heart, the accents of a voice reminding us of the tones of Jesus, the tones of the voice that will pronounce our endless doom. There is the mingled look of joy and sadness, of triumph and patient expectation,

in her human eye. She can feel pain; she has to die; she will be judged. You see she is still one of ourselves.

The day of Pentecost is come. O Eternal Spirit! what canst Thou give her, which Thou hast not given her here-tofore? She is full to overflowing with the plenitude of grace. But the mighty Wind that will not be stayed rushes round her, shaking the strong temple to its huge foundations; and tongues of fire fall like a shower of snowflakes into the very depths of her capacious soul. It is a moment only to be compared to the Immaculate Conception and the Incarnation. Yet, where is the theologian who will express for us in sober and intelligible words what happened to Mary in that her third sanctification?

Let it pass. She remained Mary still. That is all we know. She was queen of the apostles and nurse of the infant church. Do the sum of fifteen more years, and add to the manifold virtues of each moment an intensity of patience, of patient absence from her Son, which outdid, each instant, all the accumulated endurance of the Arabian Job. Is not the death-bed often a revolution in the soul, and of all men most particularly so to saints? What was it to Mary when she died of divine love, dissolved at last like sweetest frankingense in the fire which had burned around her and within her unconsumingly these three-andsixty years? From all the quarters of the globe the apostles were gathered round their dying queen, and gazed astonished at this last marvel of her grace. Who can doubt that the graces and merits of her death-bed alone were far beyond the collective excellences both of angels and of men?

When she stood before her Judge, who was her Son as well, when the commandments and the counsels were applied as tests and measures to her soul, when she had not one sin whereof to be accused, and yet threw herself more utterly on redeeming mercy, than ever judged creature did before or since, what a resplendent universe of grace she was in her own single self! Yet what was it all but one single splendour shed around her from her Son? When the mountain uprises in the clear sunshine, beautiful, well edged, and fair, it steals nothing from the sun, and its leagues of radiant land and rock and wood and water are no drain upon the solar fountains of beautifying light.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 406-409.

CXXXIX

THE NECK OF THE MYSTICAL BODY

Those whose spirit leads them to look at everything as it comes from Jesus, as His doing, or permitting, or willing, base their devotion to our Blessed Lady simply on the will of her Son; and while they by no means think lightly of the decrees of God, the intrinsic rights of the Divine Maternity, or the theological conveniences which we learn in the schools, nevertheless, they repose the devotion to our Blessed Lady on these three axioms or facts: 1. Jesus did not come without her. 2. When He came, He made the access to Him lie through her. 3. When He went He left her to be to the Church what she had been to Him, and in fact always works in the Church by her, and never without her. Now, look at the first fact, Jesus did not come without her. She was an integral part of the plan of redemption, not a mere ornament, as some speak. Can anything be merely ornamental in any work of God ? It may be doubted whether it is consistent with reverence to say so. The first thing that meets us in the Sacred Infancy is that He will not be incarnate without her consent. That there was the Incarnation was owing to her consent, and therefore that there was the Blessed Sacrament, which is a daily and hourly renewal of the Incarnation, is owing to her consent. What is present in the Blessed Sacrament by the force of consecration is just what He took from Mary, and only that, His Flesh and Blood. All else is present by concomitance.

Let us come to the second fact. When He came, He made the access to Him lie through her. When St. John the Baptist was to be sanctified, it was through her that the grace came. She was as it were deputed to confer on him the insignia of innocence. But I have already shown the parallel which there is between the Blessed Sacrament and our Lord's life in the womb. When the simple shepherds come to worship the new-born King in Bethlehem, our Lady stands guardian by the manger. When the learned kings of the East knelt to make their mystic offerings to the Omnipotent Child, it was on Mary's lap they found Him. Her knees were the seat of wisdom. If they kissed the Saviour's feet, it was she who interpreted His will, and permitted the familiarity and the grace. So too in the Blessed Sacrament, the light of her dignity shines upon the priests of her Son, and what was once her single prerogative has become the office and the right of multitudes. For what is Benediction, but repeating what was done to the shepherds and the kings? only in this, as in all things else, the Blessed Sacrament multiplies and enriches the first privileges of the Incarnation; and whereas this happened once to the shepherds and once to the kings, it now happens many times a day all the world over, and freely to mixed multitudes of good and bad.

Turn to the third fact. He always works in the Church by her, and never without her. In dogma, it has passed almost into a proverb that the doctrine about Mary shields the doctrine about Jesus, and contains it as she once contained Himself. In ritual they are never separate. In devotion they have grown together: and, in great ecclesiastical epochs, her action has been manifested to the Church in countless ways, both natural and miraculous. As M. Olier and his school have long since been prominent in teaching, just as St. Bernard taught in his doctrine about v the mystical neck of the Church, our Lord never seems to act in any notable way in the Church, without our tracing the instrumental hand and power of Mary. So it was in the Sacred Infancy; the world was governed through and from her: as the world is governed at this hour through and from the species of the Blessed Sacrament.—"The Blessed Sacrament." 164-166.

CXL

THE CHRISTIAN'S "BENEDICITE"

We should never know God as well as we do, if it were not for Mary. She reflects upon us the magnificence of God. Her dignity is the highest that can be, as St. Thomas tells us, even within the compass of omnipotence. She is a trophy of divine love, whereon the Three Blessed Persons have hung all their gifts and prerogatives which a mere creature is capable of receiving. She is clad from head to foot in the surpassing beauty of God. He has communicated Himself to her in a manner which we dare not put into words. The Church calls her by names that startle us, as if she had borrowed the titles of the Most High, and claimed common property in His attributes. We are bidden to speak of her in words which seem to belong to the Eternal Uncreated Wisdom of the Father. The Son has transferred

to the Mother what is His. She is more than all creation beside, more worthy, more beautiful, more mighty, more loved of God. Thus she is before God the unspeakable "hymn which befits Him in Sion." She is all praise, all thanksgiving. She is the repose of the Creator's merciful complacency, the plenitude of His delighted benediction. With her He is well pleased. Thus is Mary's praise an almost boundless worship which we can offer to Him. In old times the servants of God made their Benedicite of seas and mountains, birds and fishes, heat and cold, wells and green things, cattle and men. They called upon them all to praise, exalt, and superexalt the glory of the good. Creator. But Mary is the Christian's Benedicite. The Church teaches us to thank in strains of ardent love the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity for the gifts and graces of Mary, and has indulgenced several devotions to this effect. See what this implies. Enter into the spirit of the Church. Remember, Mary is the Christian's Benedicite.—"All for Jesus," 329, 330.

CXLI

THE QUEEN OF ALL SAINTS

It is not impossible that what is holding us back is defective devotion to our Blessed Lady. Without this devotion an interior life is impossible, for an interior life is one wholly conformed to the will of God; and our Blessed Lady is especially His will. She is the solidity of devotion. Yet this is not always sufficiently kept in mind. Beginners are often so busy with the metaphysics of the spiritual life that they do not attribute sufficient importance to this devotion. I will mention some of the considerations which they do not seem to lay to heart. Devotion to the Mother of our

Lord is not an ornament to the Catholic system, a prettiness. a superfluity, or even a help, one out of many, which we may or may not use. It is an integral part of Christianity. religion is not, strictly speaking, Christian without it. It would be a different religion from the one God has revealed. Our Lady is a distinct ordinance of God, and a special means of grace, the importance of which is best tested by the intelligent wrath of the evil one against it, and the instinctive hatred which heresy bears to it. She is the neck of the mystical body, uniting therefore all the members with their Head, and thus being the channel and dispensing instrument of all graces. The devotion to her is the true imitation of Jesus; for, next to the glory of His Father, it was the devotion nearest and dearest to His Sacred Heart. It is a peculiarly solid devotion, because it is perpetually occupied with the hatred of sin and the acquisition of substantial virtues. To neglect it is to despise God, for she is His ordinance, and to wound Jesus, because she is His Mother. God Himself has placed her in the Church as a distinct power; and hence she is operative, and a fountain of miracles, and a part of our religion which we can in nowise put in abeyance. Spirituality must be orthodox. This is self-evident. Now, doctrine could not be orthodox which pretermitted the office and prerogatives of the Mother of God; so neither can spirituality be orthodox, if it be distinct or separable from a just devotion to her, and a devotion generous as well as just. Indeed, a mistake in doctrine is doubly dangerous when it is worked up into the spiritual life. It poisons everything, and there is no mischief which may not be predicted of the unfortunate soul which is the subject of it. If then you have the symptoms of something wrong, something retarding you, look first of all if your devotion to our Blessed Lady is all it ought to be, in kind and degree, in faith and in trust, in love and

in loyalty. Perfection is under her peculiar patronage, because it is one of her special prerogatives, as queen of the Saints.—" Growth in Holiness," 49, 50.

CXLII

KINDNESS

THE weakness of man, and the way in which he is at the mercy of external accidents in the world, has always been a favourite topic with the moralists. They have expatiated upon it with so much amplitude of rhetorical exaggeration, that it has at last produced in our minds a sense of unreality, against which we rebel. Man is no doubt very weak. He can only be passive in a thunderstorm, or run in an earthquake. The odds are against him when he is managing his ship in a hurricane, or when pestilence is raging in the house where he lives. Heat and cold, drought and rain, are his masters. He is weaker than an elephant, and subordinate to the east wind. This is all very true. Nevertheless man has considerable powers, considerable enough to leave him, as proprietor of this planet, in possession of at least as much comfortable jurisdiction as most landed proprietors have in a free country. He has one power in particular, which is not sufficiently dwelt on, and with which we will at present occupy ourselves. It is the power of making the world happy, or at least of so greatly diminishing the amount of unhappiness in it, as to make it quite a different world from what it is at present. This power is called kindness. The worst kinds of unhappiness, as well as the greatest amount of it, come from our conduct to each other. If our conduct, therefore, were under the control of kindness, it would be nearly the opposite of what it is, and so the state of the world would be almost reversed. We are for the most part unhappy, because the world is an unkind world. But the world is only unkind for the lack of kindness in us units who compose it. Now, if all this is but so much as half true, it is plainly worth our while to take some trouble to gain clear and definite notions of kindness. We practise more easily what we already know clearly.

We must first ask ourselves what kindness is. Words, which we are using constantly, soon cease to have much distinct meaning in our minds. They become symbols and figures rather than words, and we content ourselves with the general impression they make upon us. Now let us be a little particular about kindness, and describe it as accurately as we can. Kindness is the overflowing of self upon others. We put others in the place of self. We treat them as we would wish to be treated ourselves. We change places with them. For the time self is another, and others are self. Our self-love takes the shape of complacence in unselfishness. We cannot speak of the virtues without thinking of God. What would the overflow of self upon others be in Him the Ever-blessed and Eternal? It was the act of creation. Creation was divine kindness. From it as from a fountain, flow the possibilities, the powers, the blessings of all created kindness. This is an honourable genealogy for kindness. Then, again, kindness is the coming to the rescue of others when they need it, and it is in our power to supply what they need; and this is the work of the Attributes of God towards His creatures. His omnipotence is for ever making up our deficiency of power. His justice is continually correcting our erroneous judgments. His mercy is always consoling our fellow-creatures under our hard-heartedness. His truth is perpetually hindering the consequences of our falsehood. His omniscience makes

our ignorance succeed as if it were knowledge. His perfections are incessantly coming to the rescue of our imperfections. This is the definition of Providence; and kindness is our imitation of this divine action.

Moreover, kindness is also like divine grace; for it gives men something which neither self nor nature can give them. What it gives them is something of which they are in want, or something which only another person can give, such as consolation; and besides this, the manner in which this is given is a true gift itself, better far than the thing given: and what is all this but an allegory of grace? Kindness adds sweetness to everything. It is kindness which makes life's capabilities blossom, and paints them with their cheering hues, and endows them with their invigorating fragrance. Whether it waits on its superiors, or ministers to its inferiors, or disports itself with its equals, its work is marked by a prodigality which the strictest discretion cannot blame. It does unnecessary work which, when done, looks the most necessary work that could be. If it goes to soothe a sorrow, it does more than soothe it. If it relieves a want, it cannot do so without doing more than relieve it. Its manner is something extra, and is the choice thing in the bargain. Even when it is economical in what it gives, it is not economical of the gracefulness with which it gives it. But what is all this like, except the exuberance of the divine government? See how, turn which way we will, kindness is entangled with the thought of God! Last of all, the secret impulse out of which kindness acts is an instinct which is the noblest part of ourselves, the most undoubted remnant of the image of God, which was given us at the first. must therefore never think of kindness as being a common growth of our nature, common in the sense of being of little value. It is the nobility of man. In all its modifications it reflects a heavenly type. It runs up into eternal mysteries. It is a divine thing rather than a human one, and it is human because it springs from the soul of man just at the point where the divine image was graven deepest. . . .

Mindful of its divine origin, and of its hereditary descent from the primal act of creation, this dear virtue is for ever entering into God's original dispositions as Creator. He meant the world to be a happy world; and kindness means it also. He gave it the power to be happy; and kindness was a great part of that very power. By His benediction He commanded creation to be happy; kindness, with its usual genial spirit of accommodation, now tries to persuade a world which has dared to disobey a divine command. God looks over the fallen world, and repents that He made man. Kindness sees less clearly the ruin of God's original idea than it sees still that first beneficent idea, and it sets to work to cleanse what is defiled, and to restore what is defaced. It sorrows over sin, but, like buoyant-hearted men, it finds in its sorrow the best impulse of its activity. It is labouring always in ten thousand places, and the work at which it labours is always the same, to make God's world more like His original conception of it.

But, while it thus ministers to Him as Creator, it is no less energetic and successful in preparing and enlarging His ways as Saviour. It is constantly winning strayed souls back to Him, opening hearts that seemed obstinately closed, enlightening minds that had been wilfully darkened, skilfully throwing the succours of hope into strongholds that were on the point of capitulating to despair, lifting endeavour from 'ow to high, from high to higher, from higher to highest. Everywhere kindness is the best pioneer of the Precious Blood. We often begin our own repentance by acts of kindness, or through them. Probably, the majority of repentances have begun in the reception of acts of kindness, which, if not unexpected, touched men by the sense of their

being so undeserved. Doubtless the terrors of the Lord are often the beginning of that wisdom, which we name conversion; but men must be frightened in a kind way, or the fright will only make them unbelievers. Kindness has converted more sinners than either zeal, eloquence, or learning; and these three last have never converted any one, unless they were kind also. In short, kindness makes us as gods to each other. Yet, while it lifts us so high, it sweetly keeps us low. For the continual sense, which a kind heart has of its own need of kindness, keeps it humble. There are no hearts to which kindness is so indispensable, as those that are exuberantly kind themselves. . . .

Rightly considered, kindness is the grand cause of God in the world. Where it is natural, it must forthwith be supernaturalized. Where it is not natural, it must be supernaturally planted. What is our life? It is a mission to go into every corner it can reach, and reconquer for God's beatitude His unhappy world back to Him. It is a devotion of ourselves to the bliss of the Divine Life by the beautiful apostolate of kindness.—"Spiritual Conferences," 1-4, 5, 6, 16.

CXLIII

KIND THOUGHTS

EVERYWHERE in creation there is a charm, the fountain of which is invisible. In the natural, the moral, and the spiritual world it is the same. We are constantly referring it to causes which are only its effects. Faith alone reveals to us its true origin. God is behind everything. His sweetness transpires through the thick shades which hide Him. It comes to the surface, and with gentle mastery overwhelms the whole world. The sweetness of the hidden God is the

delight of life. It is the pleasantness of nature, and the consolation which is omnipresent in all suffering. We touch Him; we lean on Him; we feel Him; we see by Him; always and everywhere. Yet He makes Himself so natural to us, that we almost overlook Him. Indeed, if it were not for faith, we should overlook Him altogether. His presence is like light, when we do not see the face of the sun. It is like light on the stony folds of the mountain-top, coming through rents in the waving clouds, or in the close forest where the wind weaves and unweaves the canopy of foliage, or like the silver arrows of under-water light in the deep blue sea, with coloured stones and bright weeds glancing there. Still God does not shine equally through all things. Some things are more transparent, other things more opaque. Some have a greater capacity for disclosing God than others. In the moral world, with which alone we are concerned at present, kind thoughts have a special power to let in upon us the light of the hidden God.

The thoughts of men are a world by themselves, vast and populous. Each man's thoughts are a world to himself. There is an astonishing breadth in the thoughts of even the most narrow-minded man. Thus, we all of us have an interior world to govern, and he is the only real king who governs it effectually. There is no doubt that we are very much influenced by external things, and that our natural dispositions are in no slight degree dependent upon education. Nevertheless our character is formed within. It is manufactured in the world of our thoughts, and there we must go to influence it. He, who is master there, is master everywhere. He, whose energy covers his thoughts, covers the whole extent of self. He has himself completely under his own control, if he has learned to control his thoughts. The fountains of word and action have their untrodden springs in the caverns of the world of thought. He, who can

command the fountains, is master of the city. The power of suffering is the grandest merchandise of life, and it also is manufactured in the world of thought. The union of grace and nature is the significance of our whole life. It is there, precisely in that union, that the secret of our vocation resides. The shape of our work and the character of our holiness are regulated from the point, different in different men, at which nature and grace are united. The knowledge of this point brings with it, not only the understanding of our past, but a sufficiently clear vision of our future, to say nothing of its being the broad sunshine of the present. But the union of nature and grace is for the most part effected in the world of thought. . . .

But kind thoughts imply also a contact with God, and a divine ideal in our minds. Their origin cannot be anything short of divine. Like the love of beauty, they can spring from no baser source. They are not dictated by self-interest nor stimulated by passion. They have nothing in them which is insidious, and they are almost always the preludes to some sacrifice of self. It must be from God's touch that such waters spring. They only live in the clammy mists of earth, because they breathe the fresh air of heaven. They are the scent with which the creature is penetrated through the indwelling of the Creator. They imply also the reverse of a superficial view of things. Nothing deepens the mind so much as a habit of charity. Charity cannot feed on surfaces. Its instinct is always to go deeper. Roots are its natural food. A man's surfaces are always worse than his real depths. There may be exceptions to this rule, but I believe them to be very rare. Self is the only person who does not improve on acquaintance. Our deepest views of life are doubtless very shallow ones; for how little do we know of what God intends to do with His own world! We know something about His glory and our own salvation, but how the last becomes the first in the face of so much evil, neither theologian nor philosopher has ever been able adequately to explain. But so much we are warranted in saying, that charity is the deepest view of life, and nearest to God's view, and therefore also, not merely the truest view, but the only view which is true at all. Kind thoughts, then, are in the creature what His science is to the Creator. They embody the deepest, purest, grandest truth, to which we untruthful creatures can attain about others or ourselves. . . .

The practice of kind thoughts also tells most decisively on our spiritual life. It leads to great self-denial about our talents and influence. Criticism is an element in our reputation and an item in our influence. We partly attract persons to us by it. We partly push principles by means of it. The practice of kind thoughts commits us to the surrender of all this. It makes us, again and again in life, sacrifice successes at the moment they are within reach. Our conduct becomes a perpetual voluntary forfeiture of little triumphs the necessary result of which is a very hidden life. He, who has ever struggled with a proud heart and a bitter temper, will perceive at once what innumerable and vast processes of spiritual combat all this implies. But it brings its reward also. It endows us with a marvellous facility in spiritual things. It opens and smooths the paths of prayer. It sheds a clear still light over our self-knowledge. It adds a peculiar delight to the exercise of faith. It enables us to find God easily. It is a fountain of joy in our souls, which rarely intermits its flowing, and then only for a little while and for a greater good. Above all things, the practice of kind thoughts is our main help to that complete government of the tongue, which we all so much covet, and without which the apostle says that all our religion is vain. The interior beauty of a soul, through habitual kindliness of

thought, is greater than our words can tell. To such a man life is a perpetual bright evening, with all things calm, and fragrant, and restful. The dust of life is laid, and its fever cool. All sounds are softer, as is the way of evening, and all sights are fairer, and the golden light makes our enjoyment of earth a happily pensive preparation for heaven.— "Spiritual Conferences," 17, 18, 20, 21, 28.

CXLIV

KIND WORDS

From thoughts we naturally pass to words. Kind words are the music of the world. They have a power which seems to be beyond natural causes, as if they were some angel's song, which had lost its way and come on earth, and sang on undyingly, smiting the hearts of men with sweetest wounds, and putting for the while an angel's nature into us.

Let us then think, first of all, of the power of kind words. In truth, there is hardly a power on earth equal to them. It seems as if they could almost do what in reality God alone can do, namely, soften the hard and angry hearts of men. Many a friendship, long, loyal, and self-sacrificing, rested at first on no thicker a foundation than a kind word. The two men were not likely to be friends. Perhaps each of them regarded the other's antecedents with somewhat of distrust. They had possibly been set against each other by the circulation of gossip. Or they had been looked upon as rivals, and the success of one was regarded as incompatible with the success of the other. But a kind word, perhaps a mere report of a kind word, has been enough to set all things straight, and to be the commencement of an enduring friendship. The power of kind words is shown also in the

destruction of prejudices, however inveterate they may have been. Surely we must all of us have experienced this our-For a long time we have had prejudices against a person. They seem to us extremely well founded. We have a complete view of the whole case in our own minds. Some particular circumstances bring us into connection with this man. We see nothing to disabuse us of our prejudices. There is not an approach to any kind of proof, however indirect, that we were either mistaken in forming such a judgment, or that we have exaggerated the matter. But kind words pass, and the prejudices thaw away. Right or wrong, there was some reason, or show of reason, for forming them, while there is neither reason, nor show of reason, for their departure. There is no logic in the matter, but a power which is above logic, the simple unassisted power of a few kind words

Kind words produce happiness. How often have we ourselves been made happy by kind words, in a manner and to an extent, which we are quite unable to explain! No analysis enables us to detect the secret of the power of kind words. Even self-love is found inadequate as a cause. Now, as I have said before, happiness is a great power of holiness. Thus, kind words, by their power of producing happiness, have also a power of producing holiness, and so of winning men to God. I have already touched on this, when I spoke of kindness in general. But it must now be added, that words have a power of their own both for good and evil, which I believe to be more influential and energetic over our fellow men than even actions. If I may use such a word when I am speaking of religious subjects, it is by voice and words that men mesmerize each other. Hence it is that the world is converted by the foolishness of preaching. Hence it is that an angry word rankles longer in the heart than an angry gesture, nay, very often even longer than a blow.

Thus, all that has been said of the power of kindness in general applies with an additional and peculiar force to kind words. They prepare men for conversion. They convert them. They sanctify them. They procure entrance for wholesome counsels into their souls. They blunt temptations. They dissolve the dangerous clouds of gloom and sadness. They are beforehand with evil. They exorcize the devil. Sometimes the conversions they work are gradual and take time. But more often they are sudden, more often they are like instantaneous revelations from heaven, not only unravelling complicated misunderstandings and softening the hardened convictions of years, but giving a divine vocation to the soul. Truly it would be worth going through fire and water to acquire the right and to find the opportunity of saying kind words!...

Weak and full of wants as we are ourselves, we must make up our minds, or rather take heart, to do some little good to this poor world while we are in it. Kind words are our chief implements for this work. A kind-worded man is a genial man; and geniality is power. Nothing sets wrong right so soon as geniality. There are a thousand things to be reformed, and no reformation succeeds unless it be genial. No one was ever corrected by a sarcasm; crushed, perhaps, if the sarcasm was clever enough,—but drawn nearer to God, never. Men want to advocate changes, it may be in politics, or in science, or in philosophy, or in literature, or perhaps in the working of the Church. They give lectures, they write books, they start reviews. they found schools to propagate their views, they coalesce in associations, they collect money, they move reforms in public meetings, and all to further their peculiar ideas. They are unsuccessful. From being unsuccessful themselves they become unsympathetic with others. From this comes narrowness of mind. Their very talents are deteriorated.

The next step is to be snappish, then bitter, then eccentric, then rude. After that, they abuse people for not taking their advice; and last of all, their impotence, like that of all angry prophets, ends in the shrillness of a scream. Why they scream is not so obvious. Perhaps for their own relief. It is the frenzy of the disregarded sibyl. All this comes of their not being genial. Without geniality no solid reform was ever made yet. But if there are a thousand things to reform in the world, there are tens of thousands of people to convert, Satire will not convert men. Hell, threatened very kindly, is more persuasive than a biting truth about a man's false position. The fact is, geniality is the best controversy. The genial man is the only successful man. Nothing can be done for God without geniality. More plans fail for the want of that than for the want of anything else. A genial man is both an apostle and an evangelist; an apostle, because he brings men to Christ; an evangelist, because he portrays Christ to men.—"Spiritual Conferences," 29, 30, 31, 32, 38, 39.

CXLV

KIND ACTIONS

There is always one bright thought in our minds, when all the rest are dark. There is one thought out of which a moderately cheerful man can always make some satisfactory sunshine, if not a sufficiency of it. It is the thought of the bright populous heaven. There is joy there at least, if there is joy nowhere else. There is true service of God there, however poor and interested the love of Him may be on earth. Multitudes are abounding in the golden light there, even if they that rejoice on earth be few. At this hour it

is all going on, so near us that we cannot be hopelessly unhappy with so much happiness so near. Yet its nearness makes us wistful. Then let us think that there are multitudes in heaven to-day, who are there because of kind actions; many are there for doing them, many for having had them done to them. . . .

The occasions for kind actions are manifold. No one passes a day without meeting with these fortunate opportunities. They grow round us even while we lie on a bed of sickness, and the helpless are rich in a power of kindness towards the helpful. Yet, as is always the rule with kindness, the frequency of its opportunities is rivalled by the facility of its execution. Hardly out of twenty kind actions does one call for anything like an effort of self-denial on our part. Easiness is the rule, and difficulty the exception. When kindness does call for an effort, how noble and selfrewarding is the sacrifice! We always gain more than we lose. We gain even outwardly, and often even in kind. But the inward gain is invariable. Nothing forfeits that. Moreover, there is something very economical about the generosity of kindness. A little goes along way. It seems to be an almost universal fallacy among mankind, which leads them to put a higher price on kindness than it de-. serves. Neither do men look generally at what we have had to give up, in order to do for them what we have done. They only look to the kindness. The manner is more to them than the matter. The sacrifice adds something, but only a small proportion of the whole. The very world, unkindly as it is, looks at kindness through a glass which multiplies as well as magnifies. I called this a fallacy. It is a sweet fallacy; and reminds us of that apparent fallacy which leads God to put such a price upon the pusillanimities of our love. This fallacy, however, confers upon kind actions a real power. The amount of kindness bears no proportion to the effect of kindness. The least kind action is taller than the hugest wrong. The weakest kindness can lift a heavy weight. It reaches far, and it travels swiftly. Every kind action belongs to many persons, and lays many persons under obligations. We appropriate to ourselves kind actions done to those we love, and we forthwith proceed to love the doers of them. Nobody is kind only to one person at once, but to many persons in onc. What a beautiful entanglement of charity we get ourselves into by doing kind things! What possesses us that we do not do them oftener?—"Spiritual Conferences," 40, 43, 44.

CXLVI

KIND SUFFERING

KIND suffering is in fact a form of kind action, with peculiar rubrics of its own. But if all kindness needs grace, kind suffering needs it a hundredfold. Of a truth, those are rare natures which know how to suffer gracefully, and in whose endurance there is a natural beauty which simulates, and sometimes even seems to surpass, what is supernatural. To the Christian no sight is more melancholy, than this simulating of grace by nature. It is a problem which makes him thoughtful, but to which no thinking brings a satisfactory solution. With the Christian, kind suffering must be almost wholly supernatural. It is a region in which grace must be despotic, so despotic as hardly to allow nature to dwell in the land. There is a harmonious fusion of suffering and gentleness effected by grace, which is one of the most attractive features of holiness. With quiet and unobtrusive sweetness, the sufferer makes us feel as if he were ministering to us, rather than we to him. It

is we who are under the obligation. To wait on him is a privilege rather than a task. Even the softening, sanctifying influences of suffering seem to be exercising themselves on us rather than on him. His gentleness is making us gentle. He casts a spell over us. We have all the advantages of being his inferiors, without being vexed with a sense of our inferiority. What is more beautiful than considerateness for others, when we ourselves are unhappy? It is a grace made out of a variety of graces, and yet, while it makes a deep impression on all who come within the sphere of its influence, it is a very hidden grace. It is part of those deep treasures of the heart, which the world can seldom rifle.

To be subject to low spirits is a sad liability. Yet, to a vigorous manly heart, it may be a very complete sanctification. What can be more unkind than to communicate our low spirits to others, to go about the world like demons, poisoning the fountains of joy? Have I more light because I have managed to involve those I love in the same gloom as myself? Is it not pleasant to see the sun shining on the mountains, even though we have none of it down in our valley? Oh, the littleness and the meanness of that sickly appetite for sympathy, which will not let us keep our tiny, liliputian sorrows to ourselves! Why must we go sneaking about, like some dishonourable insect, and feed our darkness on other people's light? We hardly know in all this whether to be more disgusted with the meanness, or more indignant at the selfishness, or more sorrowful at the sin. The thoughts of the dying mother are all concentred on her newborn child. It is a beautiful emblem of unselfish holiness. So let us also hide our pains and sorrows. But, while we hide them, let them also be spurs within us to urge us on to all manner of overflowing kindness and sunny humour to those around us. When the very darkness within us creates a sunshine around us, then has the spirit of Jesus taken possession of our souls.

Social contact has something irritating in it, even when it is kindliest. Those who love us are continually aggravating us, not only unintentionally, but even in the display of their love. Unkindness also abounds, and is of itself vexatious. Something goes wrong daily. It is difficult even for sympathy not to exasperate. Consolation is almost always chafing. We often seem to have come into the world without our skins, so that all intercourse is agony to our sensitiveness. What a field for sanctification all this opens out to us! Then there is another sort of sweetness under God's visitations; and this shows itself especially in taking all the burden we can off others. For the fact is that everybody's cross is shared by many. No one carries his own cross wholly. At least such crosses are very rare. I am not quite sure that they exist. Now, kind suffering makes us habitually look rather at what others feel of our crosses, than at what we feel of them ourselves. We see our own crosses on other people's shoulders, and overwhelm them with kindness accordingly. It is not we, who have been tossing wakeful all night, that are the sufferers, but the poor nurse who has been fighting all night against the sleep of health by our bedside, and only with partial success. It is not we, who cannot bear the least noise in the house, that deserve sympathy, but the poor little constrained children who have not been allowed to make the noise. For to children is there any happiness, which is not also noise? This is the turn of mind, which kindness in suffering gives us. Who will say it is not a most converting thing? But then it must develop itself gracefully. We must do all this unobtrusively, so as not to let others see it is done on purpose. Hence it is that the saints keep silence in suffering.—"Spiritual Conferences," 50-52.

OUR FORGETFULNESS OF GOD

FORGETFULNESS of God has been in all ages the grand evil of the world; a forgetfulness so contrary to reason, and so opposed also to the daily evidence of the senses, that it can be accounted for on no other hypothesis than that of original sin and the mystery of the fall. This forgetfulness of God has been far more common than open revolt against Him. The last is rather the sin of angels, the first the sin of men.

Yet every age of the world has its own prevailing type and fashion of iniquity; and in these latter times it appears as if the forgetfulness of God had taken the shape of forgetfulness on our part that we are creatures. Men may realise that they are creatures, imperfect, finite, and dependent. This truth may be continually coming uppermost in books of morals, in systems of philosophy, and in the general tone of society. And yet, with all this, God may be set aside and passed over, almost as if He did not exist. The world simply does not advert to Him. Who that has read certain philosophical and scientific books of the last century does not know, how men could write of creation, without their thoughts so much as touching or coming in contact with the idea of the ('reator? To such writers creation seems the end of and answer to all things, just as the Most Holy Trinity is to a believer. They speak of creation, investigate creation, draw inferences from creation, without so much as brushing against a personal or living Creator even in their imagination. Creator is to them simply a masculine form of the neuter noun creation, and they have a kind of instinct against using it, which they have probably never perceived, or never taken the trouble to explain even

to themselves. It is not on any theory, or any atheistical principle, that God is thus passed over. He is unseen, and hence is practically considered as absent; and what is absent is easily forgotten. He is out of mind because He is out of sight. There is no objection to giving God His place, only He is not thought of. This is one phase of the world's forgetfulness of God.

Then again there have been times and literary schools in which God was continually referred to, and His name used in an impressive manner, sometimes reverently and sometimes irreverently. He has been a fashionable figure of speech, or an adornment of eloquence, or the culminating point of an oratorical climax. Or there has been a decency in naming Him honourably, as if it were burning a kind of incense before Him. It soothes the conscience; it gives an air of religion to us, and it enhances our own respectability, especially in the eyes of our inferiors. And yet this word God has not in reality meant the Three Divine Persons, as the Gospel reveals them to us. It has been an imaginary embodiment or a vague canonization of an immense power, of distant majesty, and of unimaginable mystery; a something like the beauty of midnight skies, or the magnificent pageant of the storm, elevating the thoughts, quelling and tranquillizing littleness, and ministering to that poetry in our nature which is so often mistaken for real worship and actual religion. The ideas of duty, of precept, of sacrifice, of obedience, have been very indistinctly in the mind, if they have been there at all. It is the notion of a grand God, rather than a living God. The multitude of His rights over us, the dread exorbitance of His sovereignty, the realities of His minute vigilance, of His jealous expectations, of His rigid judgments, of His particular providence, of His hourly interference, these things have not been denied, but they have not been part

of the idea wakened in the mind by the word God. The close embrace and tingling pressure of His omnipresence, as theology discloses it to us, would have made the men, of whom we are speaking, start away in alarm or in disgust.

The God who demands an account of every idle word, and measures His penalties to each unbridled thought, and before whom all men are simply and peremptorily equal, is a different Being from the poetical sovereign who reigns over the Olympus of modern literature, to keep our inferiors in check, to add gravity to our rebukes, to foster our own self-respect, and, in a word, to "point a moral or adorn a tale." This God is rather our creature than our Creator: He is the creature of moral respectability, the necessity of a dissatisfied conscience, the convenience of a social police, the consolation of an unsupernatural sorrow, and the imagery of a chaste and elegant literature. Yet the atheism of this is not explicit: it is only implied. No revolt is intended. A false God has slipped into the place of the true one; and because their faith had failed, men did not see the change, and do not see it still. This is another common form of forgetfulness of God; but it does not seem to have the peculiar characteristics or particular malice of the form which we suppose to belong eminently to our own days. For in the form, of which we have been speaking, the name of God was a necessity just because men did not forget that they were creatures. Nay, it was respectable and moral to speak slightingly of human nature. its weaknesses, and its vagaries, and to say great things of the far-off God. Men's notions of God wanted correcting and purifying, enlarging and heightening; above all, they wanted to be made real, and brought home to them, and laid as a yoke upon them. Nevertheless, they remembered they were creatures; only, because they had lost the true idea of the Creator, they made the weaknesses of the creature an apology for his sin, and so went desperately astray.

But, if we mistake not, the characteristic malice of these times takes a somewhat different direction. God is certainly ignored; but He is rather passively than actively ignored, rather indirectly than directly. Men do not look at His side of the question at all. They do not pass Him over, even contemptuously. Still less do they look at Him, and then put Him away. They are otherwise engaged. They are absorbed in the contemplation of themselves. Theories of progress and perfectibility throw so much dust in their eves, that they do not see that they are creatures. They do not know what it is to be a creature, nor what comes of it. Hence, the idea of God grows out of their minds: it is thrust out of them, extruded, as it were, by the press of matter, without any direct process or conscious recognition on their parts. Their minds are purely atheist by the force of terms. They are the proprietors of the world, not tenants in it, and tenants at will. They hardly suspect that there are any claims on them.

God was a fine thought of the Middle Ages, and religion an organised priestcraft, which was not always simply an evil, but which has now outlived any practical utilities it may ever have had. God is subjective: He is an idea, He is the creature of man's mind. If there be any real truth in religion, it must be looked for in the direction of Pantheism. But the world is too busy to think much even of that. This is practically their view, or would be, if they took the trouble to have a view at all. What it comes to is this. Men are masters. They begin and end with them selves. Humanity marches onwards with grand strides to the magnificent goal of social perfectibility. Each generation is a glorious section of the procession of progress.

Liberty, independence, speed, association, and self-praise, these compose the spirit of the modern world. The word creature is a name, an affair of classification, like the title of a genus or a species in natural history. But it has no religious consequences: it entangles us in no supernatural relations. It simply means that we are not eternal, the remembrance of which is salutary, in that it quickens our diligence in the pursuit of material prosperity.

All phases of civilization have a monomania of their own. Certain favourite ideas come uppermost, and are regarded with so much favour that an undue importance is given to them, until at last the relative magnitudes of truths and duties are lost sight of, and the ethics of the day are full of a confusion that only rights itself in the failure and disappointment, in which each age of the world infallibly issues at the last. Then comes a reaction, and a new phase of civilization, and a fresh monomania; and either because the circle looks like a straight line, because we see so little of it at a time, or because the living world, like the material one, really advances while it revolves, we call these alternations progress. Now, we generally find that each of these monomanias, with its cant words, its fixed ideas, and its one-sided exaggerations, transfers its temper and characteristics to the view which it takes of God. The ideas of liberty, progress, independence, social contracts, representative government, and the like, colour our views of God, and influence our philosophy. No one can read much without seeing how the prevailing ideas of the day make men fall into a sort of unconscious Anthropomorphism about God. Indeed nothing but the magnificent certainties and unworldly wisdom of Catholic theology can rescue us from falling into some such error ourselves. At the present day particularly we should be careful and jealous in the view we take of God, careful that it should be well ascertained. and jealous that it should be according to the pattern showed us in Catholic theology.—"The Creator and the Creature," 4-9.

CXLVIII

OUR LACK OF GENEROSITY

THERE is one characteristic of man which especially preeludes our finding in him the reasons of God's amazing love. It is not exactly sin. It is not precisely any one of the imperfections to which as a finite being he is subject. It is rather the combined result of all his imperfections. He is characterized by meanness. When we do really great things, we fail in some little point of them. There is a flaw of meanness running across our generosity, and debasing every one of its products. Our love and hatred, our praise and blame, our anger and our good humour, have all got the same crack in them, this flaw of meanness.

With ourselves, what is self-deceit but meanness, what is slavery to bodily comforts, what greediness at meals, what rudeness in manners, what personal vanity, what a hundred idle extravagances of self-praise in which we daily indulge, what the inexhaustible pettiness of wounded feeling, but meanness, downright meanness?

In our intercourse with others, what is lying but meanness, what are pretence, selfishness, irritability, and more than half the world's conventions, but meanness, systematized meanness?

In our relations with God, what are lukewarmness, and hypocrisy, and self-righteousness, but meanness; what is venial sin but miserable meanness? Many a man, who has found it hard to hate himself, when he looked only at his sins, has found the task much easier when he had the

courage to hold close to his eyes for a good long while the faithful picture of his incredible meanness. What a piercing, penetrating vision it is, running all through us with a cold sharpness, when grace lets us see how low and vile, how base and loathsome, how little and how sneaking—forgive the word, we cannot find another—we are in everything. Everybody seems so good, except ourselves; and we, oh, so intolerably hateful, so ugly, so repulsive, such a burden to ourselves! And if this can be made plain to our dull, gross sight, what must it be to the clear penetration of the all-holy Majesty of God!— "The Creator and the Creature," 152, 153.

CXLIX

OUR GRATEFUL LOVE

If the quiet eye and the profound heart of the contemplative Mary delights in that love of condolence, which is such a favourite love with cloistered souls, the love of gratitude better suits the external diligence of the active Martha. The love of gratitude is pre-eminently a mindful love. It ponders things and lays them up in its heart, as our Blessed Lady did. It meditates fondly on the past, as Jacob did. It sings of old mercies, and makes much of them, like David in the psalms. It enters largely into the composition of the Missal and Breviary of the Church. Where another has the memory of his sins continually before him, a soul possessed with the love of gratitude is perpetually haunted by a remembrance of past benefits; and his abiding sorrow for sin is a sort of affectionate and self-reproachful reaction from his wonder at the abundant loving-kindness of God. The hideousness of sin is all the more brought out, when the light of God's love is thrown

so strongly on it. Hence it comes to pass that a very grateful man is also a deeply penitent man; and as the excess of benefits tends to lower us in our own esteem, so we are humble in proportion to our gratitude. But this love does not rest in the luxurious sentiment of gratitude. It breaks out into actual and ardent thanksgiving; and its thankfulness is not confined to words. Promptitude of obedience, heroic effort, and gay perseverance, these are all tokens of the love of gratitude. It is loval to God. Loyalty is the distinguishing feature of its service. It is constantly on the look-out for opportunities, and makes them when it cannot find them, to testify its allegiance to God; not as if it was doing any great thing, or as if it was laying God under any obligation, but as if it was making payment, part payment and tardy payment, by little instalments, for the immensity of His love. It is an exuberant. active, bright-faced love, very attractive and therefore apostolic, winning souls, preaching God unconsciously, and though certainly busied about many things, yet all of them the things of God. Happy the man, whose life is one long Te Deum! He will save his soul, but he will not save it alone, but many others also. Joy is not a solitary thing, and he will come at last to his Master's feet, bringing many others rejoicing with him, the resplendent trophies of his grateful love .- "The Creator and the Creature," 199, 200.

CL

OUR SERVICE OF GOD

THERE are twenty-four hours in the day, so many days in the week, and so many weeks in the year. We have various occupations, and manifold ways of spending our time; and the most careless amongst us must have some confused and general notion of the way in which his time is distributed. Now, we know that the service of God is the grand thing, or rather that it is the only thing about us which is great at all. What amount of our time then is spent upon it? How many hours of the day are passed in prayer, and spiritual reading, in hearing Mass, or visiting the Blessed Sacrament, or in other direct spiritual exercises? Of the time necessarily expended upon our worldly avocations, or the claims of society, how much is spent with any recollection of Him, or with any actual intention to do our common actions for His glory? Can we return a satisfactory answer to these questions? Furthermore, we know that it is essential to our love of God, that we should appreciate Him above all things. Does our practice show that this is anything but a form of words with us? Would strangers, who looked critically at our daily lives, be obliged to say that, whatever faults we had, it was plain that we put no such price on anything as on God? When we ourselves look into the interests and affections of our busy, crowded hearts, is it plain that, if the love of God does not reign there in solitary, unmingled splendour, at least it takes easy, obvious, and acknowledged precedence of all our other loves? This is not asking much: but can we answer as we should wish? Again, our actions are perfeetly multitudinous. If we reckon both the outward and the inward ones, they are almost as numerous as the beatings of our pulse. How many of them are for God? I do not say how many are directly religious, but how many are at all and in any sense for God? How many in the hundred? Even if we are quite clear that a virtual intention has really got vigour and vitality enough to carry us over the breadth of a whole day, and to push its way through the crowd of things we have to think, to say, to do, and to suffer—and this is a very large assumption—is this virtual intention in the morning to absolve us from the necessity of any further advertence to God, and must it not also have been made in the morning with a very considerable degree of intensity, in order to propel it for so long as twenty-four hours, through such a resisting medium as we know our daily lives to be? To use our national word, are we quite comfortable about this? Are we sure of our view about virtual intention, and without misgivings, and have we found our theory work well in times gone by?

God does not have His own way in the world. What He gets He has to fight for. What is true of the world at large, is true also of our own hearts and lives. Though we love God, and most sincerely, He has to struggle for our love. He has to contend for the mastery over our affections. The preferences of our corrupt nature are not for Him, or for His concerns. Thus it happens almost daily that His claims clash with those of self or of the world. We have to choose between the two, and give the preference to the one over the other. We are for ever having Christ and Barabbas offered to the freedom of our election. Now, do we always give the preference to God? Or if not always, because of surprises, impulses, impetuosities, or sudden weaknesses, at least do we never wilfully, deliberately, and with advertence, prefer anything else to God, and give Him the second place? And of the innumerable times in which this conflict occurs, in what proportion of times does God carry off the victory? And when He does, is it an easy victory? Or has He to lay long siege to our hearts, and bring up reinforcement after reinforcement of fresh and untired grace, until at last it looks as if He were almost going to throw Himself on His omnipotence, and overwhelm the freedom of our will? Or

again, let us look at the degree of application which we bestow on what we really do for God. Let us confront the carefulness, and forethought, and energy, and perseverance, which we bestow upon our temporal interests or the earthly objects of our love, with those which characterize our spiritual exercises. And will the result of the examination be altogether what we should desire?

All these are childish and elementary questions to ask ourselves. Yet the results are far more melancholy than when we contemplated the ignorance, aversion, and indifference of the great mass of men. More melancholy, because we profess to be God's champions; it is as it were our place to be on His side. We live encircled by His grace, which flows around us like the plentiful bright air. Our minds are illuminated by the splendours of heavenly truth, and our hearts led sweetly captive by the winning mysteries of the Incarnation. Our lives are charmed by great sacraments, and we are each of us the centre of a very world of invisible grandeurs and spiritual miracles. And in spite of all this, I will not say it is sad, it is really hardly credible. that our love of God should amount to so little as it does. whether we regard it as to the time spent upon it, or as to the appreciation of Him above all things, or as to the proportion of our numberless actions which is for Him, or as to our preference of Him when His claims clash with others, or as to the degree of application which we bestow on what we really do for Him.

Oh, look at all this by the moonlight of Gethsemane, or measure it with the Way of the Cross, or confront it with the abandonment of Calvary! Turn upon it the light of the great love of Creation, whose prodigal munificence and incomparable tenderness, and seemingly exaggerated compassions we have already contemplated! Can it be that this is the creature's return to his Creator, when the creature is holy and faithful and good, and that such is to be God's strong point in the world, the paradise of His delights, the portion of His empire where allegiance still is paid Him? Merciful Heaven! can we be safe, if we go on thus? Are we really in a state of grace? Is not the whole spiritual life a cruel delusion? And are we not after all the enemies, and not the friends, of God? Oh no! faith comes to our rescue. All is right though truly all is wrong. We are certainly in the way of salvation. Then we say once more, as we find ourselves saying many times a day, what a God is ours, what incredible patience, what unbounded forbearance, what unintelligible contentment! Why is it that very shame does not sting us to do more for God, and to love Him with a love a little less infinitely unlike the love with which, do what we can, we cannot hinder Him from loving us? -"The Creator and the Creature," 220-223.

CLI

A PICTURE OF OURSELVES

Is the following an unkind picture of ourselves? We serve God grudgingly, as if He were exacting. We are slow to do what we know He most desires, because it is an effort to ourselves. We cling to our own liberty, and we feel the service of God more or less of a captivity. Our whole demeanour and posture in religion is not as if we felt God was asking too little, or as if we were most anxious to do more than He required. We serve Him intermittingly, though perseverance is what He so specially desires. We have fits and starts; pious weeks or devout months, and then times of remissness, of effort, of coldness; then a fresh awakening, a new start; and then a slackening again. It is as if loving God went against the grain, as if we had to con-

strain ourselves to love Him, as if it was an exertion which could not be kept up continuously, as if human holiness could never be anything better than endless beginnings, and trials which are always falling short of the mark. Thus we also love God rarely, under pressure, on great occasions, at startling times, or when we have sensible need of Him. All this looks as if we did not love Him for His own sake, but for ourselves, or for fear, or because it is prudent and our duty. There is unmistakably a want of heart in the whole matter.

Have we ever done any one action which we are quite confident was done solely and purely for the love of God? If we have, it has not been often repeated. We are conscious to ourselves that there is a great admixture of earthly motives in our service of God. It is astonishing what an amount of vainglory and self-seeking there is in our love of Him. We are also perfectly and habitually aware of this; and yet, which is even more astonishing, we are quiet and unmoved. It breeds in us no holy desperation, nor does it inspire us to any vehement and determined struggles to get rid of the desecrating presence of this unholy enemy. Nay, it almost appears as if we should never have dreamed of loving God, if He Himself had not been pleased to command us to do so; and therefore we do it just in the way in which men always do a thing because they are told, and which they would not have done if they had not been told. Many of us perhaps have already given the best of our lives to the world. and now it is the leavings only which go to God. Alas! how often is He asked to drink the dregs of a cup which not the world only, but the devil also, have well-nigh drained before Him; and with what adorable condescension does He put His lips to it, and dwell with complacency upon the draught, as if it were the new wine of some archangel's first unblemished love!

Then again we exaggerate our own services, in thought if not in words; and this shows itself in our demeanour. True love never thinks it has done enough. Its restlessness comes from the very uneasiness of this impression. Now, this is not at all our feeling about God. We do not look at things from His point of view. It is only by a painfully acquired habit of mind that we come to do so. Half the temptations against the faith, from which men suffer, arise from the want of this habit, from not discerning that really the creature has no side, no right to a point of view, but that God's side is the only side, and the Creator's point of view the creature's only point of view, and that he would not be a creature were it otherwise. Another unsatisfactory sign is, that, ordinarily speaking, we have so little missionary feeling about us, and are so unconcerned whether sinners are converted, or whether men love God or not. Surely it is hard for true love to co-exist with an un-missionary spirit.

But we all of us have times when we love God more than usual, times of fervour, of closer union with Him, of momentary love of suffering, transitory flashes of things which are like the phenomena of the saints. They neither last long enough nor come often enough to form our normal state. They are simply our best times. Now, we need not dwell either upon their rarity or their brevity; but we would fain ask if even then we love God altogether without reserves. Is nothing kept back from Him? Is our renunciation of self ample and faultless? Have we no secret corner of our hearts where some favourite weakness lurks in the shade, and which the strong light of heavenly love has not blinded to its own interests? I am afraid to go on with the picture, lest I should have to ask myself at last, what is left of the Christian life? But we have seen enough to confess of our love of God, that not only is what we give very little, but that even that little is given in the most

ungraceful and unlover-like of ways. Surely this is a confession not to be made by words, which are not equal to the task, but only by silent tears, while we lie prostrate before the Throne of Him whom, strange to say! we really do love most tenderly even while we slight Him!—"The Creator and the Creature," 224-226.

CLII

TEMPTATION

TEMPTATIONS are the raw material of glory; and the management of them is as great a work as the government of an empire, and requires a vigilance as incessant and as universal. It is a startling thing to look out into the world and study its ways, and then to think that God was made man and died upon the Cross for its redemption. But it is equally startling to look at the lives of good men and examine their dispositions, and then to put one of the maxims of the Gospel alongside of them. At this very hour thousands of souls are earnestly complaining to God of their temptations, and hundreds of confessionals are filled with whispered and impatient murmurings against the vehemence or the perseverance of them. Yet St. James says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you shall fall into divers temptations." It is plain, therefore, that we either do not know or do not always bear in mind the true nature and character of temptations. They are nearly as multitudinous as our thoughts, and our only victory over them is through persisting courage, and an indomitable spirit of cheerfulness. The arrows of temptations fall harmless and blunted from a gay heart, which has first of all cast itself so low in its humility that nothing can cast it lower. Be joyous, or, to use Scripture words, "rejoice, and again I say rejoice," and you will not heed your temptations, neither will they harm you.

But let us obtain a clear idea of the nature of temptations. It seems an obvious thing to say that in the first place they are not sins; yet in nine cases out of ten our unhappiness springs from not discerning this fact. Some defilement seems to come from the touch of a mere temptation; and at the same time it reveals to us, as nothing else does, our extreme feebleness and constant need of grace and of very great grace. We are like men who do not know how sore their bruises are until they are pressed, and then we exaggerate the evil. So when temptation presses our fallen and infirm nature, the tenderness is so sensible and so acute that it gives us at once the feeling of a wound or a disease. Yet we must be careful always to distinguish between a sin and a temptation.

Temptations are either in ourselves, or outside of us, or partly the one and partly the other. Those from within ourselves arise, either from our senses which are free and undisciplined, or from our passions which are wild and uncorrected. Those which are outside assail us, either by delighting us, as riches, honours, attachments, and distractions, or by attacking us as the demons do; and those which partake of the nature of both possess the attractions of both. In one sense, however, all temptations consist in an alliance between what is within us and what is without us. As I have said before, we must not put too much upon the devil; yet neither on the other hand must we be without fear of him, or without a true and Scriptural estimate of his awful and malignant office. He goes about seeking whom he may devour. He is a roaring lion, when the roar will affright us, and a noiseless serpent when success is to be ensured by secrecy. He has reduced the possibilities and probabilities of our destruction to a science which he applies with the most unrelenting vigour, the most masterly intelligence, an overbearing power, and with the most ubiquitous variety. If it were not for the thought of grace, its abundance and its sovereignty, we should not dare to contemplate the ways and means of the Satanic kingdom.

Yet nowhere is it a mere fight between man and the devil. Wherever temptation is, there God is also. There is not one which His will has not permitted, and there is not a permission which is not an act of love as well. He has given His whole wisdom to each temptation. He has calculated its effects, and often diminishes its power. He has weighed and measured each by the infirmity of each tempted soul. He has deliberately contemplated the consequences of each, in union with its circumstances. The minutest feature has not escaped Him. The most hidden danger has been an element in His judgment. All this while the devil is passive and powerless. He cannot lay a finger on the child, until its loving Father has prescribed the exact conditions, and has forewarned the soul by His inspirations, and forearmed it with proportionable succours of grace. Nothing is at random, as if temptations were hurrying here and there, like the bullets in the air of a battle-field. Moreover, each temptation has its own crown prepared for it, if we correspond to grace and are victorious. I do not know any picture of God more affecting, or more fatherly, than the vision of llim which faith gives us in His assiduous solicitudes and paternal occupations while we are being tempted. Where wert Thou, Lord! while I was being tempted? cried the saint of the desert. Close to you, My son, all the while, was the tender reply. As men feel sorrow to be at times a privilege, because it draws them into the sympathics of their superiors, so is it a joy to be tempted because it occupies God so intensely and so lovingly with our little interests and cares. The highest saint in heaven can never attain to love God as much as God loves a soul struggling with temptations.—"Growth in Holiness," 249-252.

CLIH

THE USES OF TEMPTATION

But what are the uses of temptations? So many and so great that I can do no more than indicate a few of them here. They try us, and we are worth nothing if we are not tried. Our trial is the one thing God cares for, and it is the only thing which gives us the least knowledge of ourselves. They disgust us with the world almost as effectually as the sweetnesses which God gives us in prayer; and how hard it is to become thoroughly disgusted with the world; and how very much more we really love the world than we have any idea of! Of what price then ought anything to be which helps us to a true and final divorce from this seductive world! Temptations enable us to merit more, that is, they increase God's love of us, and our love of God, and our glory with God hereafter. They punish us for past sins; and we ought to court such punishments eagerly; for five minutes of free-will suffering on earth are worth five years of the tardy cruelties of purgatory. They purify us for God's presence, which is the very office of purgatory itself, and thus they anticipate its work and so prevent its fires. They prepare us for spiritual consolations; perhaps they even earn them for us. St. Philip says that God gives us first a dark and then a bright day all through life. Can words tell the joy it is to be consoled by God? Are not souls whom He has

touched obliged to hold their tongues, because they have no words to express the happiness it is? Yet probably without the temptation the consolation never would have come. Or if it had come, it might have harmed us. The temptation has made us capable of bearing it without loss, and tasting it and not fainting away with its unearthly sweetness. Temptations teach us our own weakness, and so humble us; and could our guardian angels do more than this for us, in all the variety of their affectionate ministrations? Dear Prince, more than brother! I say it not in light esteem of his unutterable kindness, who never leaves me a solitary speck in this huge creation of God, and whose services I shall never know till they all meet me at the doom brighter than a thousand suns, and whose love will come to a head rather than to an end when he embraces me in the first moment of the resurrection of the flesh! but he wishes nothing so much as to keep me humble, and temptations help him to do the work. They give us also a greater esteem of grace, and the want of this is daily the cause of more evil in the world than the devil can cause in a whole century. Grace grows by being esteemed. It multiplies itself when it is honoured, just as faith merits miracles, while infidelity hinders even our Lord from working them. They make virtue take deeper root, and so they play their part in the grand grace of final perseverance. How shallow would all spirituality be if it were not for temptations! How shallow good men actually are, who are not much tempted! The Church can never trust them in her hour of need. They are always on the side on which St. Thomas of Canterbury would not have been. Temptations again make us more watchful, and so, instead of leading into sin, they hinder shoals of sins. They make us more fervent, and kindle in us such a fire of love as burns away the hay and straw of venial sin, and cauterizes the half-healed wounds which mortal sin has made. A transport of generous love can do a work as great, and the great work as well, as a year's fast on bread and water, with a discipline a day. Lastly, they teach us spiritual science; for what we know of self, of the world, of the demons, and of the artifices of divine grace, is chiefly from the phenomena of temptation, and from our defeats quite as much as from our victories.

These are the uses of temptations; and they leave seven permanent blessings behind them. They leave us merit, which is no transient thing. Nay, such is its vitality that, when mortal sin has put it to death, penance can bring it to life again. They leave us love, both God's love of us and our love of Him. They leave us humility; and with that all other gifts of God; for the Holy Spirit Himself rests upon the humble, and makes His dwelling in their hearts. They leave us solidity. Our building is so much higher than it was, and its foundations more safely and more permanently settled. They leave us self-knowledge, without which all we do is done in the dark, and the sun never shines upon the soul, and the ground is never clear for the operations of grace. They leave us self-love killed; and has life a fairer task than the burial of its worst and most odious enemy? Its dead body is more to us than the relic of an apostle; and surely that is saying much. They leave us thrown upon God. For no nurse ever put a babe into its father's arms more carefully or more securely than temptations put us into the extended arms of God. And vet we complain, complain of our temptations! Perverse race! it has always been so; from beneath the apple-tree in Eden to this hour, we do not know our own happiness, and in our ignorance we pick a special quarrel with it .-"Growth in Holiness," 258-260.

CLIV

HOW TO OVERCOME TEMPTATION

How are we to overcome temptations? Cheerfulness is the first thing, cheerfulness the second, and cheerfulness the third. The devil is chained. He can bark, but he cannot bite unless we go up to him and let him do so. We must be of good courage. The power of temptation is in the fainting of our own hearts. Confidence in God is another spiritual weapon, the more potent because no one can have confidence in God who has not the completest distrust of himself. God's cause is ours; for temptation is more really the devil's wrath against God who has punished him, than against us whom he only envies. Our ruin is important to him only as it is a blow at God's glory. Thus God is bound to us, as it were; as it is for His sake that we are thus persecuted. We may be sure, indeed we know infallibly, that we shall never be tried beyond our strength. Prayer, especially ejaculatory prayer, is another obvious means of victory, together with mortification and the frequenting of the sacraments, which are all of them wells of supernatural fortitude.

Examination of conscience must help us to detect the weak and vulnerable parts of our nature; and then we must exercise ourselves in acts contrary not only to our peculiar infirmities, but also to our besetting temptations. We must avoid idleness, and crush beginnings. We must not speak of our temptations indiscriminately to persons who have no right to know anything about them, not even to our spiritual friends. It gives no real relief, and it feeds the ideas. Neither must we be cast down, if our director treats our temptations more lightly than we think they deserve. What is the good of speaking to him at all

about them, if we are not going to obey his rules and adopt his view and follow his advice?—"Growth in Holiness," 263, 264.

CLV

LITTLE TEMPTATIONS

WE must be upon our guard against very little temptations, or such as we should call little. For things must have comparative magnitudes, even where our souls are concerned. It is no uncommon thing for a man who has resisted great temptations to fall in little ones. is very intelligible. Wherever there is dignity in an action or a suffering we can the better brace ourselves up to it; for we can draw largely upon nature as well as grace. Self-love likes dignity, and will go through endless pain, as if it were an insensible thing, in order to obtain it. Hence comes the importance of little things in religion. Nature has less to do with them, and so they rivet our union with God more closely. The conversion of souls, works of mercy on a grand scale, visiting prisons, preaching, hearing confessions, and even establishing religious institutes, are comparatively easy works when put by the side of exactitude in daily duties, observation of petty rules, minute custody of the senses, or kind words and modest exterior, which preach the presence of God. We gain more supernatural glory in little things, because more fortitude is required, as they are continuous, uninterrupted, and with no dignity about them to spur us on. All the strength we require must be found within. We have no outward place or praise of men to rest our lever on; and furthermore, heroism in little things is more a matter of endurance than of action. It is a perpetual constraint.

Moreover, our spirit is more effectually taken captive in little things. Its defeats are more frequent. The very continuity of the actions forms a linked chain, which extends to many things. No attachment is to be merely natural, no word unweighed, no step precipitate, no pleasure enjoyed sensually, no joy to evaporate in dissipation, the heart never to rest on carnal tenderness alone, no action to have its spring in self-will. We tremble at such seeming impossibilities of perfection; yet it is only the perfection of little things! Then, again, there is something so humbling and secret in little things. Who knows if we count our words, or what feelings we are curbing? God will let us fall in these very respects to hide us more in Himself, and from the eyes of men. We carry the mortification of Jesus about us unseen. It is a slow martyrdom of love. God is 'the only spectator of our agony. Nay, we ourselves find it hard to realise that we are doing purely for God such a multitude of trivial things; hence we have no room for vainglory, no fallacious support of conscious human rectitude.

But in these little things we not only gain more glory for ourselves, but we give more glory to God. We show more esteem for Him in them; for there must necessarily be more pure motive and sheer faith in little than in great things. Great things by their greatness often hide God; and at the best the esteem in great things is mostly divided between God and the glory of the action, and so the whole work is tainted. Whereas the littleness and vileness of small things, their apparent facility and men's contempt for them, leave the soul face to face with God in the disenchanting twilight of interior mortification. But it is not merely esteem. More actual tribute is paid to God in little things. In great things we have more help given us, and we give God less because we have to labour less. The

abundance of grace, the sweetness of it, and the animation of spirit from the pursuit of a great object, are three things which lessen our own labour. Yet it is our own toil that is the real tribute to God, just as dry prayers are said to be more meritorious than sweet ones. In great things too we seldom have the liberty of acting as we please. In little ones we have, and we pay that liberty away hour by hour to God as a tribute of fidelity and love.

But even esteem and tribute are not all. We sacrifice more to God in little things. We think little of little things, and so we make the sacrifice, not in swelling thoughts of mightiness, but out of a subdued feeling of our own utter nothingness, and of the immense condescension of our being allowed to make any sacrifice to God at all. We sacrifice also our self-interest, which is not attracted by anything in these ignoble victims; and so we seek God only, and put aside the pursuit of praise and self. We forego also the enjoyment of strenuous manly action; for what manliness, as men count things, is there in regularity, littleness, exactness, and obscurity? Yet this is the only road to solid virtue. It was not what we read of in the saints that made them saints: it was what we do not read of them that enabled them to be what we wonder at while we read. Words cannot tell the abhorrence nature has of the piecemeal captivity of little constraints; and as to little temptations, I can readily conceive a man having the grace to be burned over a slow fire for our dearest Mother's Immaculate Conception or the Pope's Supremacy, who would not have the grace to keep his temper in a theological conversation on either of those points of the Catholic faith.— "Growth in Holiness," 265-268.

CLVI

SEEKING PRAISE

WHEN we lay ourselves out for praise, or even very obviously acquiesce in it, we are letting ourselves be deceived by others, often without any fault of theirs. We do not plead guilty to half the amount of love of praise which we have in us. It is quite preposterous even in the humblest of us. We live lives of prayer and sacraments, and yet are all the while itching for praise. Whoever saw any one that was not? The gravest, sleekest, most pompous of men, smooth themselves down and unbend themselves in glossy patronizing benevolence under the siren breath of praise, like the swell of a summer sea when the gentle south wind blows. Cold men thaw with an amusing reluctant eagerness under the same operation, and dignity descends even to playfulness under the resistless attractions of praise. Silent men, however, are the grand lovers of praise. They are ruminating creatures; self is the cud they chew, and, strange to say, they do not find it bitter. Like thirsty camels in the desert who suck up the muddiest water with relish, so we with praise are almost regardless of its quality. No matter how absurd, how unmerited, how exaggerated, or from what feminine or childish incapacity of just appreciation it may spring, wise and grave men among us drink it down. We set a value upon it and attach an importance to it, and feed on its scraps, in a manner which ought to make us thoroughly ashamed of ourselves. All we require is that certain rules of good taste should be observed by those who administer this sweet spoon-meat to us grown-up babies. But these rules vary with national character. An Irishman must be praised differently from an Englishman, and an American, and a Frenchman differently from both, and from each

other. But praised we must all be, or we shall sulk. Monkeys can look grave when they scratch each other. But then they are monkeys. We are men, gifted with reason: how is it we do not smile at an operation which is really so absurd? Because we do not know ourselves. Whoever knew an eminent lover of praise, who did not imagine he was peculiarly above public opinion? Or whoever knew a man that boasted of his independence of the judgments of others, who was not servile, and base, and touchy, and fawning, and deceitful, and vain? After all, we are monkeys, and we only grow into men by knowing that we are not men yet.—"Spiritual Conferences," 162, 163.

CLVII

FALSE HUMILITY

THERE is the self-deceit which is falsely humble. It has a great affinity to the scrupulous self-deceit, but perhaps comes more near to be incurable. It is true that self-deceit is a mark both of intellectual and moral weakness. But then there are few characters in the world which have not at least one point, at which they are both intellectually and morally weak. With some the intellectual weakness comes from the moral; with most the moral comes from the intellectual. We must not therefore be surprised at finding apparently strong and clear characters, which are nevertheless the victims of this extremely foolish self-deceit which arises from false humility. Everyone feels that humility is preeminently the saintly virtue, and therefore every one aims at mastering it. But it is uncommonly difficult to master, while it seems almost impossible to nature to go on believing itself so little good as it must believe itself, so long as it

believes itself not to be humble. Hence something must be done in order to shorten the process of its acquisition. Unfortunately, some of the saints have occasionally spoken ill of themselves. Whereupon we also will speak ill of ourselves, not in the least believing what we say, and still less conceding any right to others to believe us. Every man in the world has his little circle of flatterers, just as an insect has its parasites. These are either foolish enough or insincere enough to be pleased with our self-abuse; and we, finding it a cheap heroism, are by no means economical in the matter. But this self-abuse has a remarkable tendency to produce spiritual blindness. It does not seem to be so much a disease superinduced upon the soul's eye, as a positive wearing away of that by which alone the soul can see at all, a destruction of its very power of seeing. Its blindness is complete when it has come to believe, as it does at last, what it says against itself, and what it began to say only from conceit and affectation. A man in this state is ignorant of that, which of all things in the spiritual life it is most necessary for him to know, his own want of courage. This is because his false humility never allows him to try himself. He thinks, in his artificial self-abjection, which has now become real without becoming true, that he ought only to attempt low things for God; and therefore he does what is below his strength, without trying what is level with it or above it. Yet, mean-spirited as it grows, this self-deceit is not without a kind of pride in its safety and discretion, while it does not see at all its peculiarly odious form of ungenerosity. All deluded souls will be much surprised at the day of judgment, but we should imagine the greatest and most painful surprise of all is that which awaits the soul self-deceived by false humility.-"Spiritual Conferences," 181, 182.

CLVIII

THE USES OF SIMPLICITY

GENERAL simplicity of life is an antagonistic power to selfdeceit. Every additional degree of simplicity, which there is in our conduct, weakens the influence of self-deceit, diminishes its force, and subtracts its occasions. Simplicity is in the spiritual world what light is in the natural world. We cannot have a better idea of it than that which light gives us. The energy of light is such that scarcely anything can be exposed to it, for a few moments even, without some change taking place in it. Both animal life and vegetable life languish, if they are deprived of light. It gives the green to the leaves and the colours to the blossoms. The want of light will ever turn the course of nature, or rather will frustrate its designs. Some animals cannot develop in the dark. A tadpole becomes a gigantic tadpole if it is kept in the dark, but it cannot take the step of becoming a frog. Some people say diamonds are made by light. Many salts will not crystallize in the dark. We might multiply these things indefinitely; and yet we should find them all types and allegorics of the action of heavenly simplicity in the spiritual life. A man who habitually thinks of God, or one who thinks of God first and himself second, or one who does not sensibly live and act under the eyes and tongues of others, or one who does his duty lovingly, making few returns upon self, is as nearly an impossible subject for the greater triumphs of self-deceit as can be found among us poor self-loving, self-seeking creatures. With such souls self-deceit is almost mitigated into some other disease, when it does come, like the smallpox in vaccinated subjects. There are certainly endless reasons for being simple, and many of them extremely

cogent; but there are few more cogent than the reflection that all simplicity is a general unfitness for self-deceit. Its constitution has something in it peculiarly uncongenial to that disease.—"Spiritual Conferences," 201, 202.

CLIX

THE REMEDIES FOR SELF-DECEIT

WHEN a man makes a series of discoveries, and such discoveries generally do come in a series, that he is the victim of continual self-deceit, and that what he valued as the principal basis of his inward life has been neither more nor less than a delusion, it will often be his wisest policy to remould his spiritual system, and cast it into some one concentrated practice; and the practice most suited to his case will be that of making acts of purity of intention, trying to render his pious intention actual, instead of virtual or habitual. The bird that lives on the leaves and berries of the huaco tree, and then fights with serpents, and is stung by them, and suffers not, because its ordinary nutriment is an antidote, presents us with an emblem of the soul that lives on purity of intention. Serpent-fighting is the work of all souls. Few, however, have the safe agility and speedy aim of the secretary-bird, to fly up to heaven with their snakes, and let them fall from the height to earth, and so be dashed to pieces, without either giving the reptiles the opportunity of a bite, or allowing them to hamper its wings with their writhing folds. We must be content for the most part to eat the antidote, and then let ourselves he stung. But this remedy, of concentrating the whole power of the soul on purity of intention exclusively, cannot be indiscriminately recommended to all. It will do more

harm than good to those who are scrupulous: and if few are scrupulous naturally, many are made so by the indiscretions of direction; so that, by fault or by misfortune, no slight proportion of pious persons are partially scrupulous. But those with whom the remedy agrees will find it almost a specific. Those whom it makes unhappy it does not suit. There is no serving God in unhappiness, when the unhappiness is of our own making. Let us serve God in the sunshine, while He makes the sun shine. We shall then serve Him all the better in the dark, when He sends the darkness. It is sure to come. But meanwhile false darkness is worse than false light. It is more deceiving. peopled with phantoms, rife with delusions. So, if seeking to make our intentions for God's glory always actual entangles our conduct instead of simplifying it, if it darkens our spirit instead of illuminating it, we may be sure it is not the right road for us, though it is right in itself, and right for so many others. Safe things are dangerous to those for whom they are not intended. Only let our light be God's light, and our darkness God's darkness, and we shall be safe at home when the great nightfall comes.—"Spiritual Conferences," 202, 203.

CLX

DEVOTIONS CORRECTIVE OF SELF-DECEIT

THE choice of our devotions may be turned into a remedy for self-deceit. Two may be particularly selected as more or less specific against self-deceit, as they are representations of the eye of God. It is not easy to look God in the face, and then tell ourselves a lie. The planets were imaged in the water an hour ago, but the round moon has climbed heaven, and has effaced their tremulous reflections. So

with us the eye of God eclipses the world's eye. If we become deceivers, and surely this is the ordinary process, by acting always under a consciousness that men's eyes are upon us, whatever distracts us from that baneful consciousness frees us from a slavery which, like all slaveries, makes liars of us. The eye of God alone can do this. What is it which makes political parties so essentially dishonest, even when composed of honest units, but the continual sense of being watched, the unintermitted feeling of critical and unkindly, eves being fixed on every move? Yet, on a smaller scale, the life of most of us is spent under a like bondage. The emancipation from this tyranny of human respect is one of the most beautiful operations of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It is not an emblem, or an idea, or a moving ritual, or a stirring relic, which is before us, but Jesus Himself, our actual Lord, in all the awful reality of that most peculiar Eucharistic life. The more we are with the Blessed Sacrament the less we shall deceive ourselves. Who has not seen how that particular devotion changes souls, how it achieves conversions, how it perfects imperfect conversions, how it lifts men's graces into a higher sphere, how it fills out vacant places in faulty characters, and gives symmetry and correctness to impulse and injudicious devotion? What is all this but saying that it is just the devotion to preserve us from self-deceit? But we cannot be always with the Blessed Sacrament; and the thought of it is quite a different thing from its presence. We must carry with us another devotion into the thick of life, devotion to our Guardian Angel. He is an eye of God, while his eye sees the unveiled God close to us, still when we are still, and moving as we move. He is nearer to us than any of our human critics. His criticisms are faultlessly just, and their justice is equalled by their kindness. When saints come habitually to see with their bodily eyes their Guardian Angel, it appears to me almost a natural consequence of their sanctity, developing in them by degrees the power of beholding God, just as the command over the elements and animals, which saints have, especially saints of remarkable austerity, seems to be the almost natural working of penance back to the state of man's unfallen innocence. The sight of their Guardian Angel is a growth of their holiness, and an emblem of what is inward, even while it is also a peculiar and gratuitous gift of God. Human respect soon begins to relax its hold upon us, when we come to love our Guardian Angel with so much respectful tenderness that we feel his presence almost without effort.—"Spiritual Conferences," 209, 210.

CLXI

WORLDLINESS

Oн, it is a radiant land, —this wide, outspread, many-coloured mercy of our Creator! But we must be content for awhile now to pass out of its kindling sunshine into another land of most ungenial darkness, in the hope that we shall come back heavy-laden with booty for God's glory, and knowing how to prize the sunshine more than ever. There is a hell already upon earth: there is something which is excommunicated from God's smile. It is not altogether matter, nor yet altogether spirit. It is not man only, nor Satan only, nor is it exactly sin. It is an infection, an inspiration, an atmosphere, a life, a colouring matter, a pageantry, a fashion, a taste, a witchery, an impersonal but a very recognizable system. None of these names suit it, and all of them suit it. Scripture calls it, "The World." God's mercy does not enter into it. All hope of its reconciliation with Him is absolutely and eternally precluded. Repentance is incompatible with its existence. The sovereignty of God has laid the ban of the empire upon it; and a holy horror ought to seize us when we think of it. Meanwhile its power over the human creation is terrific, its presence ubiquitous, its deceitfulness incredible. It can find a home under every heart beneath the poles, and it embraces with impartial affection both happiness and misery. It is wider than the Catholic Church, and is masterful, lawless, and intrusive within it. It cannot be damned, because it is not a person, but it will perish in the general conflagration, and so its tyranny be over, and its place know it no more. We are living in it, breathing it, acting under its influences, being cheated by its appearances, and unwarily admitting its principles. Is it not of the last importance to us that we should know something of this huge evil creature, this monstrous sea-bird of evil, which flaps its wings from pole to pole, and frightens the nations into obedience by its discordant cries?

But we must not be deceived by this description. The transformations of the spirit of the world are among its most wonderful characteristics. It has its gentle voice, its winning manners, its insinuating address, its aspect of beauty and attraction; and the lighter its foot and the softer its voice, the more dreadful its approach. It is by the firesides of rich and poor, in happy homes where Jesus is named, in gay hearts which fain would never sin. the chastest domestic affections it can hide its poison. the very sunshine of external nature, in the combinations of the beautiful elements,—it is somehow even there. The glory of the wind-swept forest and the virgin frost of the alpine summits have a taint in them of the spirit of the world. It can be dignified as well. It can call to order sin which is not respectable. It can propound wise maxims of public decency, and inspire wholesome regulations of police. It can open the churches, and light the candles on the altar, and intone *Te Deums* to the Majesty on high. It is often prominently and almost pedantically on the side of morality. Then again it has passed into the beauty of art, into the splendour of dress, into the magnificence of furniture. Or again there it is, with high principles on its lips, discussing the religious vocation of some youth, and praising God and sanctity, while it urges discreet delay, and less self-trust, and more considerate submissiveness to those who love him and have natural rights to his obedience. It can sit on the benches of senates, and hide in the pages of good books. And yet all the while it is the same huge evil creature which was described above. Have we not reason to fear it?—"The Creator and the Creature," 351-353.

CLXII

WOMEN OF THE WORLD

Ladies who go to balls, theatres, gay watering-places, and the like, who deny themselves none of the personal luxuries and comforts of the nineteenth century, who find piety very much squeezed in the pressure of a London season, and yet do not very well see how to make more room for it,—these forsooth are to be supposed to be so many incipient Gertrudes or Theresas! We must not set them to examine their consciences too carefully, because of the extreme sensitiveness they exhibit to their own faults, nor to mortify themselves, because of their already inordinate appetite for discomforts and macerations. Their voluntary social arrangements are the tyranny of indispensable circumstances, claiming our tenderest pity, and to be managed like the work of a Xavier or a Vincent of Paul, which hardly

left those saints time to pray! Their sheer worldliness is to be regarded as an interior trial, with all manner of cloudy grand things to be said about it! They must avoid all uneasiness; for such great graces as theirs can only grow in calmness and tranquillity! It is lucky we may still make a poor drunken Irishman uneasy; for thus we have a chance of saving some souls at least, though of a truth not these London souls. There were old saints in the Middle Ages, that St. Bernard for example, surnamed the Mellifluous, he of the honeved tongue, who, if he had in a leisurely way contemplated some of these moderns on their path to perfection, would have given them a taste of his honey after this fashion: -Sir or Madam, strain every nerve to keep out of hell, which methinks you will not do in this manner; and do use your common-sense for a moment to remember that you are dealing with God, who is not "mocked"! A speech, apostolic, and perhaps brutal, which would cause fainting-fits, followed by a most reasonable disgust, and be generally condemned in the present day. The fidget is, whether, after all, our modern way is the right way; for if the road should end, and heaven's gate be found not to be at the end, the condition of these sensitive susceptible souls, which have required so much smoothing and calming, would be undeniably awkward, and, it is to be feared, helpless. —"Spiritual Conferences," 149-151.

CLXIII

THE WORLDLINESS OF PIOUS PEOPLE

WE can trace the influence of worldliness upon pious people. Their frequentation of the sacraments, their church-going, their almsgiving, their interest in Catholic plans, contrast

strangely with their anxiety to get into society, with their hankering after great people, with their excitement about marriages, with the perpetual running of their conversation on connections, wealth, influence, and the like, and their unconscious but almost gross respect for those who are very much richer than themselves, or very much higher than themselves. It would never do for them to sit for a picture of Catholic devotion. Yet they do not see all this. and they are really full of God, always talking of Him, always planning for Him, always fidgety about His glory. Sometimes a step further is taken, and we see a most portentous union of piety and worldliness-really as if one person were two persons; one person in church, and another person out of church; one person with priest and religious, and another person with worldly company. These people make the oddest compensations to themselves for their pious self-denials, and again with such grotesque earnestness penance their worldliness in revenge for its inroads upon their piety, that they remind us of the stories Protestants tell us of the Italian bravos, who, before they commit a murder, most devoutly recommend it to the Madonna. Yet God and the world keep the peace so unbrokenly in their hearts that they have hardly a suspicion of the incongruous appearance they present to others, still less of the horrible reality of their spiritual Now if we can see all this in others, is it at-all likely that we are free from it ourselves? Depend upon it there is no freedom but in excessive fear, no security but in a weary vigilance! It is heavy work always to be keeping guard. But there is no sleep in the enemy's camp, and we are in a war which knows neither peace nor truce. The night is both cold and long, and if divine love keeps us not awake, what else is there that will ?-" The Creator and the Creature," 374, 375.

CLXIV

A SEARED CONSCIENCE

A SEARED conscience! This is a fearful possibility; and yet, to use the Apostle's expression (1 Tim. iv.), "the Spirit manifestly saith" that there is such a thing. It is, according to St. Paul, one of the marks of heresy. It belongs also peculiarly to worldliness. To have gone on for such a length of time doing wrong, that we have at last ceased to advert to its being wrong; to sin, and for the monitor within to be silent; to forget God and not to remember that we are forgetting Him-all this is surely far worse than to be a savage or an idolater. But this is to have a seared conscience. This is the tendency of worldliness—a tendency which it can develop with incomparable swiftness. And then where is the power of coming right again? We have drifted away from all the sweet facilities of repentance. We have hardened ourselves against the ordinary impetus of grace. We have made ourselves so unlovely that grace would shun us if it could. We have sold ourselves to the devil, and he has got us safe before the proper time. With most men it is enough to say that if they erred, at least they had a good conscience about it, or that their conscience told them it was wrong, and they are sorry they gave way. But if we have a seared conscience, neither of these things avails. We have forgotten and pretermitted God! we did so contumeliously at first; but now our habitual contempt has superinduced oblivion: it seems as if He were going to retaliate, to pay us back in our own coin, and for the present at least to pretermit us. We no longer know when we are in danger. We have lost our chart. We can tell nothing of our latitude and longitude. No land is in sight; nothing but a waste of boundless waters. The sun is hidden, and we can take no observations, and have taken none for ever so long a time. The night is so grim and murky, that not a star will give us an indistinct notion where we are; and the needle is snapped, and we know neither north nor south, nor east, nor west. What are our chances of safety now? There has come upon us the fatal woe of Isaias, "Woe to you that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (chap. v.).—"The Creator and the Creature," 364-366.

CLXV

A FEARFUL POSSIBILITY

THERE is nothing to compare with worldliness for vitiating the moral taste. There are some possibilities on earth which we cannot bear to think of without shuddering. It is generally God's merciful ordinance that we should not know them in the individual cases, even when we see them. One of these is the possibility of a man's going hopelessly out of his mind, when he is in a state of mortal sin. If he is to have no intermission of his madness, no lucid interval before his death; if he was actually in mortal sin when the last step of his aberration was completed, and reason had abdicated her throne entirely; then he is as it were damned already. He walks about the earth a living part of hell. His fate is sealed while the sun still shines upon his head, and the flowers grow beneath his feet, and the birds sing as he passes. He smiles, but he is lost. He sings, but he is the hopeless property of God's great enemy. Kindness

touches his heart, but grace has ebbed from it for ever. He belongs to the dismal centre of the earth; it is only by accident that he is walking on its radiant surface. This is one of earth's fearful possibilities. And the seared conscience of worldliness is a desperately near approach to this. Faith is still there, and reason also, and a miracle of grace can rouse them both. But are worldly people the likely subjects of God's miracles? The sweet miracle of conversion haunts the company of publicans and sinners, not the undoubting self-sufficiency of this world's Pharisees. O poor worldling, maliciously and guiltily unsuspecting now of thy real state, that man who went mad in mortal sin is thy shadow, thy brother, and thy type!—"The Creator and the Creature," 366.

CLXVI

TWO VIEWS OF PROSPERITY

We cannot have a better instance of the uncongeniality of the world with the spirit of the Gospel, than their difference in the estimate of prosperity. All those mysterious woes which our Lord denounced against wealth, have their explanation in the dangers of worldliness. It is the peculiar aptitude of wealth, and pomp, and power, to harbour the unholy spirit of the world, to combine with it, and transform themselves into it, which called forth the thrilling maledaction of our Lord. Prosperity may be a blessing from God, but it may easily become the triumph of the world. For the most part the absence of chastisement is anything but a token of God's love. When prosperity is a blessing, it is generally a condescension to our weakness. Those are fearful words, "Thou hast already received thy reward"; yet how many prosperous men there are, the rest

of whose lives will keep reminding us of them; the tendency of prosperity in itself is to wean the heart from God, and fix it on creatures. It gives us a most unsupernatural habit of esteeming others according to their success. As it increases, so anxiety to keep it increases also, and makes men restless, selfish, and irreligious; and at length it superinduces a kind of effeminacy of character, which unfits them for the higher and more heroic virtues of the Christian character. This is but a sample of the different ways in which the Church and the world reason. "The Creator and the Creature," 358.

CLXVII

HUMAN RESPECT

HUMAN respect is a fault most keenly felt by spiritual persons, and comparatively little felt by others. It is more like an atmosphere than anything else, and can hardly be eaught and punished in distinct acts. But it is a thing of which there can be no doubt. We have an infallible consciousness of it. It gives undeniable evidences of its own existence. It destroys all liberty, and becomes the positive tyrant of a man's life. Yet if we look well into it, nothing can be more stupid than our submission to it. For we set little or no value on the separate opinions of individuals; and when the judgment is in our favour, it can do us no good, neither, unless true, can it afford us any rational pleasure. Indeed its power is altogether in the prospect, and not in the present possession. Yet it is almost universal, and must be dealt with as one of the most inconvenient facts of the spiritual life. Look at a person who is completely under its domination. Watch him in society and public life, or in the bosom of his family, or in the intimacies of friendship, or at confession and in conference with his director, or even with God in prayer, or in utter solitude. It is as if the omnipresence of God was sponged out all round him, and that some other powerful eye was fixed upon him, ruling him with a power like that of the solar light, and causing in him at all times an almost preternatural uneasiness.

It is not difficult to see the evils of this miserable worldpresence, this spirit which gathers all mankind up into an eve and throws its portentous fascination upon our souls. It causes men to be false and insincere in their mutual relations, and to act inconsiderately with others. It destroys all generous enthusiasm either for charity or penance. It puts a man under the despotism of ridicule, which becomes a kind of false god to him. It is the contradictory of perfection and, while it is in force, renders it impossible; for it is always drawing us off from God to creatures. A brood of sins of omission follow it wherever it goes, sprung from shame and the fear of ridicule, and another brood of sins of commission, from the desire to please. In process of time, and the process is not slow, it establishes itself as an habitual distraction in prayer and meditation; and as to examination of conscience, that most real of spiritual exercises almost seems to supply food for the voracity of human respect.

It is as miserable as it is evil. The bondage of Carthusian austerity would be easier to bear. No slavery is more degraded and unhappy. What a misery to be ashamed of our duties and our principles! What a misery that every action should have a flaw in it, and a blight upon it! What a misery to lose at last, as we must inevitably do, the very thing for which all our sacrifices have been made, the respect of others! Misery of miseries, thus to lose even respect for self! Religion, which ought

to be our peace, becomes our torment. The very sacraments have a feeling of incompleteness about them, as if we did not, as we do not, use them rightly; and our communication with our director, which should be medicinal, is poisoned by this spirit. Surely we must try to get to the bottom of the matter, and to study the various phases of this disease of pious souls. A general wish to please, a laying ourselves out in particular subject-matters in order to please, building castles in the air and imagining heroic acts, reflecting on the praise bestowed upon us, and giving way to low spirits when dispraised—these are all manifestations of this horrible human respect.

Human respect, however, is not so much a particular fault, as a whole world of faults. It is the death of all religion. We shall never have an adequate horror of it, until we admit that these hard words are no exaggeration. Let us therefore look at the place which it occupies in the grand struggle between good and evil. First of all, let us trace its rise; for this is a difficult problem, considering how in detail we all disbelieve in each other. The especial task of Christians is the realization of the invisible world. They have different standards of right and wrong from the votaries of earth. They live inextricably mixed up with the children of the world, as men using the same language with different meanings, and the confusion and apparent deceit grow worse every day, and the world, the owner of the territory or its lessee, more and more angry, and inclined, in spite of its theory of haughty toleration, to persecute those who thus wilfully put themselves at variance with the public peace. Men feel that religious people are right, and on that very account they will not look the fact in the face and submit to it. They feel it, because they feel that they are not irresponsible. Yet they chafe at the judgments of God and His incessant

interference. They chafe at the quiet way in which He gives His judgments and takes His own time to execute His verdicts. So, not being able to do without the judicial power, they consolidate God from Three Divine Persons into a function, a cause, a pantheistic fluid, or a mechanical force, and transfer the judicial power to mankind in a body. This seems to be the account of human respect in the mind. Men in all generations fret under God's judicial power. It seems as if, because of this fretfulness, it were one of the most unutterable of His compassions, that He should have confided His ultimate judicial rights to our Lord as Man, and that in virtue of the Sacred Humanity He should be our judge. Looked at in a human point of view, men's transfer of the judicial power to themselves may be said to have worked admirably. Social comfort, a standard of endurable morals, and generally what may be called for the moment liveableness, have come of it. It causes a certain amount of individual unhappiness, because its police is harsh and rough, and the procedures of its court unkindly and of the Draconian school. But men have a compensation for this in its giving over to them utterly unquestioned the whole region of thought. Under the administration of God thoughts were acts, and were tried and found guilty as such. They furnished the most abundant materials for its tribunals. and were just what caused His jurisdiction to press so heavily upon the soul. Now all this is free. Calumny, detraction, rash judgments, spiteful criticism—they make us wince as they visit our outward acts; but we may be as base as we please in thought, and yet walk through human courts with proud eye and head erect.

No wonder that when once human respect has taken its place among the powers of the world, it should cause especial desolation in the religious mind, and become a worse evil and a greater misery there than elsewhere. Indeed it is itself a sort of spurious counterfeit religion. For what is religiousness but the sensible presence of God, and religion the worship of Him? In religion the presence of God is our atmosphere. Sacraments, and prayer, and mortification, and all the exercises of the spiritual life are so many appointments, not only for realising that presence, but for substantially introducing it both into body and soul. The respiration of our soul depends upon it. It produces a certain kind of character, a type of its own sort and easily recognized, a supernatural character which inspires other men with awe, love, hatred, or contempt, according to the different points of view from which they look at it. To the pure-minded it is the greatest possible amount of happiness on earth; for it infuses into us a certain marvellous unreasoning instinct for another world, as being faith's sight of Him who is invisible. Yet it is hardly conscious what it is it sees. Now, is not human respect in its own way a simple copy and caricature of all this? A something which undertakes to perform for the world every function which the presence of God performs for the enlightened soul? It is in fact a mental paganism.

It is this similarity to a false religion which makes human respect so peculiarly dangerous. It does not alarm us by any grossness. On the contrary, it forces sin into conecalment. Not that this is any real boon to the best interests of men, for certain of the deadliest of sins thrive best under cover. It confuses the boundaries between public opinion and itself, and pretends an alliance with prudence and discretion. This is a stratagem to be guarded against. For public opinion is within limits a legitimate power; and the man who, because he was devout, should lay it down as a principle that he would never respect public

opinion or be swayed by it, would be paving the way for the triumphs of delusion. Nothing can be more alien to the moderation of the Church. There is a vast difference between what my fellow citizens expect of me, and show beforehand that they expect and give reasons for expecting, and the criticism they may pass upon my actions and my doing them rather with reference to that criticism than to the wish of God. I may be very indifferent to the criticism, while I am bound to respect the expectation. Moreover, human respect unsupernaturalizes actions, which are good in substance. It kills the nerve of the intention; but it gives us no such smart warning as the nerve of a tooth does in dying. It is like a worm in a nut; it eats away the kernel of our motive, and lets the fruit hang as fairly from the tree as ever. Religion is so much a matter of motives that this amounts to destroying it altogether; and as human respect introduces a directly wrong motive in lieu of the right one, it destroys spirituality in the most fatal way. Thus it is one of the completest instruments, which corrupt nature puts into the devil's hands and at his disposal for the destruction of souls. What can be more hateful than this, and what more odious in the sight of God? A caricature is always odious, and it is odious in proportion to the beauty and dignity of what it caricatures; and as we have seen, human respect is a caricature of the presence and judicial power of God.

Few are aware, until they honestly turn to God, how completely they are the slaves of this vice. Then they wake up to a sense of it, and see how it is in their blood, as if it were their life and their identity, an inexplicable unconquerable vital thing. Its rise is a mystery, for which we can only invent a theory. No one can tell for sure how it rose, or when, or why; it has been like an exhalation from corrupt humanity, the spreading of a silent

pestilence that has no external symptoms. There is not a class of society which it has not mastered, no corner of private life that it has not invaded, no conventual cell but its air is freighted with the poisonous influence. It rivals what theologians call the pluri-presence of Satan. Its strength is so great that it can get the better of God's commandments and of the precepts of His Church, nay, of a man's own will, which last conquest even grace and penance find it difficult to achieve. It appears to increase with civilization, and with the extension of all means of locomotion and publicity. In modern society men systematize it, acknowledge it as a power, uphold its claims, and punish those who refuse submission. God is an ex-king amongst us, legitimate perhaps but deposed. It is much if we build Him in His own kingdom a house made with hands, that He may dwell therein and keep Himself within doors. Surely if the evil one has not preternaturally helped human respect, he has at least concentrated his energies on its spread and success. He is never more a prince than when he stoops to be the missionary of human respect.

Look into your own soul, and see how far this power has brought you into subjection. Is there a nook in your whole being, wherein you can sit down unmolested and breathe fresh air? Is there any exercise however spiritual, any occupation however sacred, any duty however solemn, over which the attractive influence of human respect is not being exercised? Have you any sanctuary the inside of which it has never seen? When you have thought it conquered, how often has it risen up again, as if defeat refreshed it like sleep? Does it not follow you as your shadow, as a perpetual black spot in the sweet sunshine? Yet how long is it since you turned to God, and became spiritual? How many Lents and Months of Mary have

you passed, how many sacraments have you received, how many indulgences have you gained? Yet this human respect is, in spite of them all, so active, so robust, so unwearied, so ubiquitous. Can there be any question nearer your heart than what concerns the remedies for this evil?

The Church provides remedies for us in two ways, in her general system, and in her dealing with individual souls. She begins by boldly pronouncing a sentence of excommunication against the world. She ignores its judgments in her own subject-matter of religion, and proclaims its friendship nothing less than a declaration of war against God. She gives her children different standards of right and wrong from the world, and an opposite rule of conduct. All her positive precepts and her obligations of outward profession of faith are so many protests against human respect, and she canonizes just those men who have been heroes in their contempt for it. The world feels and understands the significance of these things, and shows it by anger, exhibiting all the quick jealousy of a conscious usurper.

But of far greater efficacy are the remedies which she administers to single souls in the confessional and in spiritual direction. The world dreads the secret power of that benign, cogent, and unreported tribunal. First of all, the practice of the presence of God is pitted against this universal human respect. We are taught how to act slowly, and to unite all our actions to God by a pure intention. We are bidden to take this fault as the subject of our particular examination of conscience, to pray earnestly against it, and to be full and open about our falls when we accuse ourselves in confession. Even in indifferent things we are recommended to adopt that line of conduct which tells most against human respect, were

it only for the sake of mortification. This is often the rationale of the seemingly absurd and childish mortifications imposed in religious houses. For human respect is but a veiled worship of self, which we seem to transfer to the world, because self is even to us so small an object; and whatever kills this worship of self, as such mortifications do, is a blow to human respect. In casting out devils the saints have often delighted to use puerile means; so also may we cast this devil out of ourselves. Once let our souls be possessed by a timid, childlike devotion to the eye of God, eternal and unsleeping, and human respect will die away and disappear, as the autumnal leaves waste in the rain and enrich the soil for the coming spring.—"Growth in Holiness," 126-134.

CLXVIII

THE LOSS OF JESUS

The loss of Jesus, however brief, is the greatest of all evils. It was this which was almost unbearable to our Lady, and Jesus is not more needful to us than to her, because to all creatures He is absolutely needful; only to us He is a more pressing necessity, because of our weakness and our sin. The greatness of Mary's sorrow is to us a visible measure of the magnitude of the evil. Yet alas! how little we feel it! How happy can men be who yet have lost Jesus, often unconscious almost of their loss, more often indifferent to it when they know it! We should have thought the loss of Jesus was in itself so fearful an evil, that nothing could have aggravated it; and yet our want of perception of the greatness of our loss is a token of still deeper misery. It is sad indeed when the voice of the world is more musical in our ears than the voice of our Lord. It is just the very

wretchedness, the very hatefulness of the world, that it has no Jesus. He does not belong to it. He refused to pray for it. He pronounced its friendship to be on our part a simple declaration of war upon Himself. It makes our hearts sink to look out upon the world, and to know that it has no part in Him. It is like gazing upon a cheerless and disconsolate view of barren moors or dreary swamps. No sunshine can gild it. It is dismal on the brightest day. Nay, it is ugliest when the sun shines upon it. So is it with the world, because it has no Jesus. So does it become with us in proportion as we are friends with the world, or even at peace with the world. He and it are incompatible. Are we not afraid? Pleasure, gaiety, fashion, expense, dare we, even in our thoughts, put these things into the Heart of Jesus? Would He smile when worldly things were said? Would He wish to please people round Him, who are taking no pains whatever to please His Father? Would He seek to be popular in society, to stand well with those who have not at heart the only one interest which He has at His, to keep out of sight His principles, not simply through silence and reserve, but lest they should ruffle others and interfere with that smoothness of social intercourse which takes the place of charity.

Alas! sin is bad; excess of pleasure is bad; giving God the second place is bad; worshipping the rich is bad; hardening our Christian feelings to become accustomed to worldly frivolities and very slightly uncharitable conversation is bad. But these at least are evils which wear no masks. We know what we are about. We give up Jesus with the full understanding of the sacrifice we are making. We are taking our side, choosing our lot, and we know it. But, wishing to please! this is the danger to a spiritual person. Total separation from Christ is already implied in the very idea. What is it we wish to please? The world,

which is the enemy of Jesus. Whom do we wish to please? Those who are not caring to please God, and in whom Jesus takes no pleasure. Wherein do we wish to please? In things, conversations, and pursuits which have no reference to God, no savour of Christ, no tendency towards religion. When do we wish to please? At times when we are doing least for Christ, when prayer and faith and hope and love and abiding sorrow for sin would be the most unseasonable. Where do we wish to please? In haunts where there is less evidence of God than elsewhere, where every circumstance, every appurtenance, flashes the world's image back upon us as from a lustre. Yet we see no evil. We want smoothness, polish, inoffensiveness, discreet keeping back of God. He said that He and Mammon would not dwell together. But to some extent we will force Him so to dwell. He shall at least keep the peace with the world, and learn to revolve alongside of it in His own sphere, without encroaching, without jarring. Dreadful! Is there not hell already in the mere attempt? Yet how little men suspect it. It is like something noxious getting into the air, and not at first affecting the lungs. But the lights burn dim, then one by one they go out, and we are left in the darkness, unable to escape, because lethargy and suffocation have already begun with ourselves. In other words, high principles gently lower themselves, or are kept for state occasions, such as Lent, or a priest's company. Then we begin to be keenly alive to the annoyance which comes to us from the conversation of uncompromising Christians, and we pronounce them indiscreet, and by that ceremony they are disposed of to our great comfort, and we praise them more than ever, because by that reserve we have got rid of what fidgeted us in them, and we lull to rest the remaining uneasiness of conscience by this greater promptitude of a praise which we have first made valueless

by counterweighing it. Then it dawns upon us that it is a duty to keep well with the world even for God's sake. Then keeping well edges on to being friends with the world. Then there begin to be symptoms of two distinct lives going to be lived by us; but we do not see these symptoms ourselves. Then uncomfortable feelings rise in us, taking away our relish for certain persons, certain things, certain books, certain conversations. We rouse ourselves, and take a view, an intellectual view, of the rightness of being smooth and not offending, and getting on well with the world. The view comforts us, and we are all right again. Then God's blessings, His spiritual blessings, very gradually and almost imperceptibly, begin to evaporate from us, from ourselves, our children, our homes, our hearts, and everything round us. But the sun of prosperity shines so clearly, we do not see the mist of the evaporation rising up from the earth, and withdrawing itself into heaven. Perhaps we shall never awake to the truth again. Trying to please is a slumberous thing. So we drift on, never suspecting how far the current is carrying us away from God. We may die without knowing it. We shall know it after that, the instant afterwards.

Thus we may lose Jesus in three ways. We may abruptly break from Him by sin. We may quietly and gracefully withdraw from Him, confessing the attractions of the world to be greater than His. We may retire from Him slowly and by imperceptible degrees, always with our face towards Him, as we withdraw from royalty, and all because He is not a fixed principle with us, and the desire to please is so. But if we have lost Him in any one of these three ways, sin, worldliness, and the love of pleasing, and He rouses us by His grace, what are we to do? This third dolour teaches us. It must be a dolour to us. We must search for Him whom we have lost. He may not allow us to find Him all at once. He probably will not. But we must put off every-

thing else in order to prosecute our search. Other things must be subordinate to it. They must wait, or they must give way. But we must not be precipitate in our search. We must not run, we must walk. We shall miss Him if we run. We must not do violent things, not even to ourselves, although we richly deserve them. It is not a time for taking up new penances. The loss of Jesus is penance enough, now that we have found it out. We must be gentle, and sorrow will give us gentleness. Hence our search must be also a sorrowful one, as Mary's was. We must seek Jesus with tears, with tears but not with cries, with a broken heart but a quiet heart also. We must seek Him also in the right place, in Jerusalem, in the temple, that is, in the Church, and in sacraments, and in prayer. He is never among our kinsfolk. He never hides in the blameless softness of a kind home. This is a hard saying, but this dolour says it. All these are the conditions of a successful search. It was so Mary sought Him; it was so she found Him. We must be of good cheer. Everything has its remedy. Even worldliness is curable, and it is by far the nearest to incurable of any of our diseases. If our whole life has been but a desire to please, if every thought, word, action, look, and omission has got that poison at the bottom of it, we must not be cast down. To change the habit is too difficult. We will change the object. It shall be Jesus instead of the world. Who ever knew people more thoroughly all for God, than some who were once notably all for the world, nay, it would seem, the more notably heretofore for the world, the more thoroughly now for Him?—"The Foot of the Cross," 191-195.

CLXIX

LOSS OF TIME

THE use of time is a large subject; and it is one of far greater consequence than many suppose, in those who are aiming at perfection. Bellecius, in his work on Solid Virtue, gives a whole book to the one act of early rising, which is but a single instance of our use of time. We have to remember that time is the stuff out of which eternity is made, that it is at once precious and irrevocable, and that we shall have to give the strictest account of it at the last. Very few faults are irreparable, but the loss of time is one of those few; and when we consider how easy a fault it is, how frequent, how silent, how alluring, we shall discern something of its real danger. Idleness, moreover, when it has fastened upon us, is a perfect tyranny, a slavery whose shackles are felt whatever limb we move, or even when we are lying still. It is a captivating bondage also, whose very sweetness renders it more perilous. But the worst feature about it is its deceitfulness. No idle man believes himself to be idle except in the lucid intervals of grace. No one will credit how strong the habit of losing time will rapidly become. To break away from it requires a vehemence and a continuity of effort to which few are equal. Meanwhile the debatable land which lies between it and lukewarmness is swiftly traversed. The hourly accumulation of minute carelessness is clogging and hampering the soul, while it is also running us fearfully into debt to the temporal justice of God. It makes our life the very opposite of His. His minute notice of us stands in dreadful contrast with our half-intentional and half-unintentional oblivion and disregard of Him. I doubt if a jealous and conscientious use of time can ever, as many spiritual excellences can, become a habit. I suspect time is a thing which has to be watched all through life. It is a running stream, every ripple of which is freighted with some tell-tale evidence, which it hastens to depose with unerring fidelity in that sea which circles the throne of God. It makes us tremble to think of St. Alphonso just after he had made his solemn vow never to waste a moment of time. We feel that a man, who with his humility and discretion dared to commit himself to such a life, could only end by being raised upon the altars of the Church.—"Growth in Holiness," 213, 214.

CLXX

LETTER-WRITING

In these days of cheap and rapid postage we ought to be more jealous of our correspondence than we are. Is it too much to say that every letter we write is more or less a drain upon our spirituality? If this be so, ought we not to make a rule to ourselves against unnecessary letterwriting, against the writing of any letter which either business or social propriety or affection does not render practically unavoidable? Time is precious, and we have little of it; and yet how much is spent in writing letters, and how many pretend that all their letter-writing is safe because it is, they say, a veritable mortification! Attachments are multiplied and strengthened by correspondence, while it increases our objects of auxiety, magnifies our reasons for being nervous and restless, and caters for that idolatry of family ties which nowadays wages such a vigorous warfare against the manliness of Christian sanctity.

Letter-writing tends also to increase the natural exag-

geration of our character. We express ourselves in an exaggerated manner, and our style at last transfers its exaggeration to our feeling. We thus form a false estimate of things; and are greatly troubled about small events, or highly excited about low expectations. What is the family circle generally, but ineffable trifles seen through a hugely magnifying medium? It reminds us at every turn of Wordsworth's real sufferer in the workhouse, when she says,

"I heard my neighbours in their beds complain Of many things which never troubled me!"

Unreality is another obvious effect of excessive correspondence; for to make much of little things is to be unreal. Sacraments and prayer cease to have their natural and legitimate proportions, when we are so eager, and decisive, and communicative about children, residences, visits, summer plans, and winter projects. We make a romance of ourselves in our letters, and paint life with an artificial rouge because its native complexion is for the most part unhealthy and dull. If our letters turn on religious subjects, so much the worse; for then they are full of detraction, levity, and spiritual gossip.—"Growth in Holiness," 207, 208.

CLXXI

CASTLES OF INDOLENCE

BUILDING eastles in the air is another branch of this useless industry, and by far the least innocent. Did anyone ever eatch himself building a castle in the air which did not in some way redound to his own honour and praise? Can religious men spend an hour in giving magnificent mental

alms, or bearing crosses heroically, or undergoing martyrdom, or evangelizing continents, or ruling churches, or founding hospitals, or entering austere orders, or arranging edifying deathbeds, or working miracles at their own tombs. without their being essentially lower and grosser, vainer and sillier men, than they were when the hour began? They acquire a habit of admiring fine things without practising them. It is worse than novel-reading, for here men write as well as read them. They become intoxicated with conceit and sentimentality. It gives a tincture of puerility to all they do, and lowers them in thought, feeling, and purpose. Do not be startled at the strong words, but this castle-building literally desolates and debauches the soul. It passes over it like a ruinous eruption, leaving nothing tresh, green, or fruit-bearing behind it, but a general languor, peevishness, and weariness with God.

There is no doubt that life is dull. But it is surprising how soon youth finds it out. Indeed, the pressure of this sense of dulness appears to be more felt in boyhood and girlhood than in the opening years of mature life. Hence it is that young people are often so much given to building eastles in the air. This is especially the case with children who have no brothers and sisters, or who are educated at home, or who have uninteresting homes and are not provided with that adequate amount of excitement which is such an essential element in wise education, or who are orphans living with relations, or who are the children of widows, around whom there is an atmosphere of sad stillness and soft melancholy. Children under these circumstances acquire with extraordinary facility a habit of thinking novels, making romances out of their thoughts as a recreation for themselves, romances at the bottom of all whose interesting situations self lies hid, and is often not so much as suspected. Such a habit should be regarded by parents and guardians with the greatest horror, and met by prompt and even severe remedies, remedies often amounting to temporary separation. this form of eastle-building is the ruin of after-life. It is the cause of a great amount of the unhappiness in marriage. I can hardly think of a habit of sin, which would frighten me more in young people than this peculiar form of castlebuilding; its poison is so penetrating, so tenacious, and so long-lived. Mrs. Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Brontë gives us a fearful picture of the misery and ruin, which may come of it even in its most favourable form, the form in which self appears to mingle least. A soul corrupted by this habit is the hotbed of every vice. Sin grows in it with almost visible rapidity, attains tropical stature, and brings forth with tropical exuberance. So far as future consequences are concerned, a boy or a girl might as well read the vilest novels all day long, as have a habit of thinking novels in their own heads. It would require a distinct treatise to trace out in all their unsuspected windings the deplorable contaminations of this habit. We must try to believe that no evil habit is incurable; but are there many amongst us who have had the comfort of knowing a case in which this habit was actually and radically cured? -"Growth in Holiness," 208-210.

CLXXII

RECREATION

It is difficult to exaggerate the results of well-managed recreations. The spirit cannot always be on the stretch. The bow must be unstrung sometimes, or it will spoil. Now, a well-managed recreation does three things; it preserves all the grace already acquired without suffering one

fraction of it to be lost, or one degree of fervour to evaporate. The love of God runs on from the work into the recreation, and thus the habit of recollection remains unbroken, and we are keeping to the side of our Heavenly Father in our amusements as closely as in our work or in our trials. Secondly, it not only keeps together the past, and preserves its spirit, but it gains us strength and freshness, bravery and promptitude, for the future. Old grace is consolidated, and the appetite for new is quickened. Children are said to grow more while they are sleeping than while they are awake. So it is with us in recreation. This is its third function. We grow in it. It is no standing still. It is not only a blessing for the past, and a blessing for the future; it is a present blessing, because it is present growth. It increases our cheerfulness; and whatever makes us cheerful in devotion, gives us more power. It would be a great thing if recreation merely kept us from sin, by filling up and occupying vacant hours when the infirmity of human nature compels us to intermit our direct attention to religious things. We should owe to it our preservation from a thousand sins of thought, and dissipating inutilities both of mind and heart. But this is far below its real work. Its function is not less important in the spiritual life than is that of sleep in the natural life; and, like sleep, it has need of a wise, considerate, and firm legislation. - "Growth in Holiness," 211, 212.

CLXXIII

PRESUMPTION

A MAN must be a fool to be presumptuous in religion. Nevertheless we can be very foolish when we least expect it. St. Theresa says humility is the first requisite for those who wish to lead an ordinarily good life; but that courage is the first requisite for those who aim at any degree of perfection. Now, presumption is never very far from courage; and hence we must be upon our guard against it. We may fall into it in many different ways; and I will mention some of them. There is a proverb that the first blow is half the battle. I do not think it holds in spiritual matters: and the reason I do not think so is that such a number of persons are called to devotion and an interior life, who break down and abandon it. The fault was not in the first blow. It was vigorous enough, loving enough, humble enough. The fault was later on; it was either that they got tired of mortification, or that they fell into a common superstition about grace, and when it did not come true they were disgusted. This superstition consists in imagining that grace is to work like a charm, almost without the concurrence of our own wills. A man will not get up at his proper time in the morning. He says he cannot; which is absurd, for there is no physical power holding him down in his bed. The fact is, he will not: he does not choose to do it; the virtue of it or the obedience of it is not worth the pain of it. He pleads that overnight he made a resolution to get up next morning, and asked the souls in purgatory to get him up. The morning comes; the air is cold; meditation is uninteresting; sleep is pleasant. No souls have come from purgatory to pull him out of bed, draw his curtains, light his fire, and the rest. It is not therefore his affair. He has done his part. He finished it all last night; but grace has not worked. What can he do? This is only a picture of a thousand other things. Multitudes, who would have been nigh to saints, remain nigh to sinners from this singular superstition about grace. What we want is not grace; it is will. We have already a thousand times more grace than we correspond to. God is never wanting on His side. It is the manly persistent will which is wanting on ours.—"Growth in Holiness," 13, 14.

CLXXIV

FAMILIARITY

ONE enemy with whom we have to struggle is familiarity; and familiarity, especially, with three things-prayer, sacraments, and temptations. As I have said before, to have relations with God is a very fearful thing. To love God is a hold and arduous undertaking. It was of His compassion that He made that to be of precept which was in itself so unspeakable a privilege. Yet it is hard to love warmly and tenderly, and to love reverently as well. Hence it is that, with so many, familiarity fastens upon love, and blights it. Familiarity in prayer consists of meditating without preparing, of using words without weighing them, of slouching postures, of indeliberate epithets, of peevish complaint, and of lightly making the petitions of saints our own. All this is an intolerable familiarity with the great majesty of God. It grows upon us. Use brings slovenliness, and slovenliness makes us profane. Familiarity with the sacraments consists in going to confession with a very cursory examination, and a mere flying act of contrition, making no thanksgiving afterwards and setting no store by our penance; as if we were privileged people, and were entitled to take liberties with the Precious Blood. With the Blessed Eucharist it consists of frequent Communion without leave, or forcing leave, or making no preparation, or careless thanksgiving, as if forsooth our whole life were to be considered adequate preparation and adequate thanksgiving, and that it shows liberty of spirit to be on such free and easy terms with the adorable Sacrament. Familiarity with temptations is to lose our horror of their defiling character, to be remiss and dilatory in repelling them, to feel our loathing of them diminish, not to be sufficiently afraid of them, and to take for granted that we are so established in any particular virtue that our falling is out of all question. These familiarities grow upon us like the insidious approaches of sleep. We feel an increasing reluctance to throw them off and shake them from us. It will not be so much the thoughts of hell and purgatory, wholesome as they are, which will keep us right, as frequent meditation on the adorable attributes of God. If our flesh were but always pierced with the arrows of holy fear, how much more angelic would our lives become!—"Growth in Holiness," 93-95.

CLXXV

INDISCRETION

LET us think how it is that beginners—for I may almost say we are but beginners in spirituality, though what may be technically called our beginnings are past—how it is for the most part that they offend those around them and bring devotion into discredit and disrepute. I would not be harsh, as the world is, in speaking of these faults, for with what difficulties are they not surrounded, what enormous allowances are they not privileged to claim, and what an immense thing it is that they should thus be working heart and soul for God at all! Besides which, it is the old leaven of the world to which they belonged, not their new principles, which are to blame for what is ungraceful or amiss in their behaviour.

They offend, then, by indiscretion, not observing the pro-

prieties of time, place, age, person, and circumstances; by inconsistency, because their conduct must appear such to those who cannot discern in them the internal war which they are waging; by irritability, far less probably than what the most unkindly critic would forgive if he saw the inward soreness and the weariness of spirit which strife and temptation cause; by singularity, because it is not easy for a man at once to take up with a new set of principles, and always apply them correctly and gracefully to the claims of conflicting duties; and, finally, by what is in truth no fault of his, but scandal taken rather than given, because the maxims of the Gospel are so rudely uncongenial with the maxims of the world.

We must, therefore, persuade ourselves that it is very important to our spiritual progress and interior holiness that we should take great pains in our intercourse with others, in order that we may be to them the good odour of Christ. Negligence on this point is the reason why many fail in their attempts after perfection, and while they are looking within for the cause of their ill-success, the true reason of it is to be found all the while in their external conduct.

Now, there is a wrong as well as a right in every spiritual question. There is a wrong way of trying to edify people as well as a right one, and we will consider the wrong one first. We must never attempt to edify others by any sacrifice of principle to show, for example, how free we are from bigotry, or how independent of forms and ceremonies, or what liberty of spirit we have regarding the observance of certain positive precepts. This is only saying that we must not do evil that good may come. Yet there is no slight temptation to a man, especially if he has a little fit of unusual discretion upon him, to show others at some expense of strict principle that our holy religion is not so

harsh and cruel as it seems to be to the votaries of the world. The attempt, however, is always as unsuccessful as it is wrong.

We must never do anything in order to edify others, for the express purpose of edifying, which we should not have done except to edify them, and in the doing of which the motive of edification is supreme, if not solitary. Edification must never be our first thought. The evangelical rule is to let our light shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. We must take great pains not to disedify, but it would be very dangerous to take great pains to edify. The two things are very different, although they are often confounded: and you will not unfrequently meet with souls whom self-love has so gnawed and corrupted that their perfect restoration would be little less than a miracle, and the mischief of which is to be traced to a wrong theory of the duty of giving edification. Look out to God, love His glory, hate yourself, and be simple, and you will shine, fortunately without knowing it, or thinking of it, with a Christlike splendour wherever you go and whatever you do.

We must not make unseasonable allusions to religion, or irritate by misplaced solemnity. An inward aspiration or momentary elevation of the soul to God will often do more even for others than the bearing of an open testimony, which principle does not require, and at which offence will almost inevitably be taken. There is a silence which edifies without angering, though I admit that the practice of it is far from easy. Probably we practise it most successfully when we realise it least, but act out of a heart which is in union with God. A man is annoyed with sacred things when they are unseasonably forced upon him, and thus even a well-meaning importunity may be a source of sin.—"Growth in Holiness," 62-64.

CLXXVI

DISCRETION

NOTHING can be too much, for nothing can be enough, for God. But our grace is limited. God calls each one to a certain height and no higher; and although we can never know to what height we shall reach before we die, vet still at each step grace is dealt out to us by measure, and we must be careful not to run beyond our present grace. Grace does not do away with either our weakness or our cowardice. We must not give way to them, but we must take them into our calculations, and not only allow for them but give them liberal allowance. Mortification is a matter in which an honest will may be carried away by mere natural motives and may do too much; and this applies equally both to interior and exterior mortification. Discretion bids us keep in mind that mortification is always a means and never an end. It tells us that discontinued mortifications are the very bane of spirituality. No man undertakes to do a thing for God, and lays it aside because he finds perseverance in it too much for him, without his soul being seriously damaged by it. He has taken up a disadvantageous position. This is not a reason for not trying, but it is a reason for trying soberly, discreetly, and with deliberation. Discretion will have mortification free from the slightest blemish of singularity. It will have charity to others lord paramount of all self-denials and austerities. It gives the relative duties of our states, that eighth sacrament as I have called them, precedence over them; and when mortification wears out our good temper, and makes us short and snappish, discretion would have us after a little trial lose our penance rather than our temper.

In our prayers and spiritual exercises discretion will

have us moderate and tranquil, and all things in due keeping with our state of life. It allows of no eagerness or anxiety. It condemns all inordinate pursuits, even though the acquisition of virtue be the object of them, and it equally prohibits all greediness of spiritual favours. It takes out of our hands books which are too high for us, as breeding scruples and disturbing us. It watches over a vocation as if it were its enemy; for to commit ourselves to a way of life, in which we cannot persevere, is like doing something which will make us bed-ridden all our days.—"Growth in Holiness," 448-450.

CLXXVII

LUKEWARMNESS

THERE is nothing in the spiritual life which arrests our attention so forcibly as lukewarmness, because of the unusual language in which it has pleased God to express His ineffable disgust with it, and the startling doctrine which accompanies the declaration of His loathing, that coldness is less offensive to Him than tepidity. Who is it, then, with whom God is so exceedingly displeased, that He is sick of His own redeemed creature? We tremble at the answer. It is the man, who is patient when he has nothing to suffer, who is gentle while he is uncontradicted, who is humble when men leave his honour untouched, who wishes to be a saint without the trouble of it, who seeks to acquire virtues without mortification, who is willing to do many things but not to take the kingdom of heaven by violence. Alas! here are verified the dread words of the Prince of the Apostles. "The time is that judgment should begin at the house of God; and if first at us, what shall be the end of those who believe not the gospel of God? And if the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the wicked and the sinner appear?" (1 St. Peter iv. 17, 18).

The diseases and evils of the body are, as might be expected, seeing they are the immediate outflowings of sin. in a great degree typical of the miseries and misfortunes of the soul. If we seek the correlative of lukewarmness, we shall find it in blindness. It is a blindness which does not know even its own self, and does not suspect that it is blind, or that other men see better than itself. It is a judicial blindness, because it once saw better itself, and now does not remember either what it saw, or that it ever saw at all. It is usual to consider that this blindness is owing principally to three causes, the frequency of venial sins, habitual dissipation of mind, and the ruling passion. The frequency of venial sins is like travelling in the wilderness, where the bright air is imperceptibly filled with fine sand. Habitual dissipation of mind is like reading in the sunshine, and living in a light too strong for our eyes. The ruling passion is an external violence which menaces us, and makes us shut our eyes, and have them always shut, that we may not see what it would fain hide, and so, when we open them after long being used to darkness, it is the very light itself which blinds us.

The immediate results of this blindness are three also. In the first place conscience becomes untrue. The body does not move firmly and in a straight line in the dark. So the conscience also must see in order to keep its balance. But if we falsify the oracle, and still believe in it, what is the consequence but error and corruption everywhere? If the light that is in us be darkness, says our Lord, how great is that darkness! So first there comes a false conscience. But in proportion as conscience becomes dark, and so cold, and finally numb, in the same proportion the bad instincts

of the human spirit, like owls at night, get more farsighted, animated, and vivacious. These instincts lead us with uncommon tact to avoid anything which will restore animation to the conscience. For their purpose it had best remain under chloroform for life. Thus they make us shrink from anything like vigorous spiritual direction. We suspect we shall be awakened, and driven, and made too good. Discretion, that is, the discretion of the blind conscience, tells us this shrinking is wisdom and sagacity. We must, it says, be moderate in everything, but, of all things, amazingly moderate in the love of God. So in hearing sermons, reading books, cultivating acquaintances, patronizing works of mercy, it draws back from everything that is likely to come too near or hit too hard. It is the old story of the earthen jug and the brazen jar as they went down the stream together. Here is the second result of this blindness, which renders the cure still less likely. Indeed, it is a characteristic of tepidity, that everything we do while we are in that state has a tendency to confirm us as incurable. Out of the two preceding results flows a third, which is a profane use of the sacraments. To go to Holy Communion when we are physically drowsy, yawning, and half asleep, or to make our general confession half stupefied with laudanum, would be fair types of the way in which we morally use the sacraments. Thus, frequent or even daily Communion seems to have only a negative effect upon us. We do not know how bad we might be without it; and that is all. Weekly confession gives us no additional power over our commonest imperfections. Matters look as if they had come to a stand still, if I am right in thinking there is any such phase of the spiritual life. But no! we are blind men whose faces have been turned unwittingly. We are retracing our steps; and the only wonder is that the easier task of going down hill does not by its contrast make us suspicious of some mistake. Alas! we are asleep as well as blind. The finest things we do now are no better than feats of somnambulism.

It is plain from this description that what is of the greatest practical utility in this matter of lukewarmness, is a thorough acquaintance with the symptoms by which the insidious disease allows itself to be detected. These are seven in number; and according as we perceive that we unite them in ourselves, either in number or degree, so we have reason painfully to doubt whether our spiritual evesight is not failing. The first mark of lukewarmness is a great facility in omitting our exercises of piety, which is the exact contradictory of fervour. Every one has his routine of pious exercises; and there are few days in which they do not entail upon us some little inconveniences. Perhaps it is one of their special uses to do this, particularly if habitual distractions are going to make the exercise itself of small value. Now, these little inconveniences suggest dispensations, or at least delays which we see confusedly will turn out dispensations at the last. Clearly there are cases in which conflicting duties or the needs of charity will interfere, and it will be more perfect to give way to them than to read or meditate. But most often the inconveniences concern only ourselves. We have the power to dispense ourselves; and we grant these dispensations either rarely and with reluctance, or often and with facility. If the latter be the case, behold the first mark of tepidity! I do not say that by itself it proves everything; but it proves much. At all events, wherever there is lukewarmness, there also is this symptom. But we are not only easy in omitting exercises of piety, we are negligent in those which we do perform. We care more about the fact of going through them, than the manner or the spirit of it. Thus, our prayers rise to heaven with

an equipage of venial sins in attendance upon them, and the angels are reluctant witnesses of our confessions and Communions. This is a second symptom. Here is a third. The soul feels not altogether right with God. It does not exactly know what is wrong; but it is sure all is not right. It casts about to see. It quarrels with everything it does, and questions each of them, and yet the mischief eludes it. It is angry with its confessions; yet it is not easy to settle how to amend them. Something always seems unexpressed, something left behind, which ought to have come out and does not. What is it? Then the Communions are overhauled in a similar way, the examens of conscience tortured, meditations reprimanded, spiritual books cashiered, together with a determination to reform everything. General orders are issued from self's headquarters, in which strong things are said ambiguously. Every one feels he is aimed at. Blame lies everywhere. Yet all to no purpose. At last when we have given the matter up, we suddenly come upon the offending thing, just as we look for a lost article till we are hot and tired, and then all at once see it lying in open day in a spot we have searched four or five times before. Now, when we have this feeling of not being altogether right with God, and yet will not vigorously face the inquiry, and make the disturbance I have described, and buckle to the triple task of discovery, punishment and reformation, it is a symptom of our being lukewarm.

A fourth symptom of lukewarmness is an habitual acting without any intention at all, good, bad, or indifferent, of which I spoke in the preceding chapter. A fifth is carelessness about forming habits of virtue. This is the opposite of the inordinate appetite for self-improvement already considered: the truth lying here, as it mostly does in spiritual matters, in a mean. A sixth symptom is a

contempt of little things and of daily opportunities. This is a necessary part of our blindness. We can only despise little things because we do not discern the capabilities of glorifying God, and advancing our own spiritual interests, which they contain. The seventh and last symptom is a thinking rather of the good we have done than of the good we have left undone, resting on the past rather than striving for the future, loving to look at people below us rather than people above us. Our own ease and self-complacency find their account in this attitude of the soul. This is the way in which tepidity attacks the inmates of convents. When religious become lukewarm, they like to measure themselves with the poor citizens of the world, rather than with the grand saints of their own order. They are ever calculating the sacrifices they have made, and fondly realising to themselves the glory of their self-devotion. When these signs are observed, superiors recognize in them the alarming symptoms of tepidity. It all lies in one word. Such religious do what St. Paul said he did not do. They count themselves to have apprehended. "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do; forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I pursue towards the mark, for the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus. Let us, therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded" (Philipp. iii. 13-15). . . .

I fear this evil of lukewarmness is very common, and that, at this moment, it is gnawing the life out of many souls who suspect not its presence there. It is a great grace, a prophecy of a miraculous cure, to find out that we are lukewarm; but we are lost if we do not act with vigour, the moment we make this frightening discovery. It is like going to sleep in the snow, almost a pleasant

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tingling feeling at the first, and then,—lost for ever.—"Growth in Holiness," 432-437, 440.

. CLXXVIII

THE MERCY OF GOD

A MAN goes forth from his house into the streets of London in a state of mortal sin. The weight of God's wrath and the curse of the blood of Christ are heavy on his soul. To the angels he is a sight of unutterable loathing and disgust, if his state is known to them. He would not dare to have his sins whispered in the crowd, for the contempt even of his fellow sinners would crush him to the earth. He is the slave of the dark demon, in a bondage more foul, more degrading, more tyrannical, more abject, than the horrors of African slavery can show. In his breast, though he hardly knows it, he has the beginnings of hell, and the germs of everlasting hatred of Almighty God. Cain, savage and gloomy and restless, wandering curse-goaded over the unpeopled earth, was not worse off than he, perhaps better.* In the street he meets a funeral, or he comes across a priest by whose demeanour he perceives that he has got the Blessed Sacrament with him. Thoughts crowd into his mind. Faith is awake and on the watch. Grace disposes him for grace. The veil falls from sin, and he turns from the hideous vision with shame, with detestation, with humility. The eye of his soul glances to his crucified Redeemer. Fear has led the way for hope, and hope has the heart to resolve, and faith tells him that his resolution will be accepted, and he loves-how can he help loving-Him who will accept so poor a resolution? There is a

^{*} St. Chrysostom thinks that Cain repented and was pardoned.

pressure on his soul. It is less than the sting of a bee, even if it hurts at all. Yet it was the pressure of the Creator, omnipotent, immense, all-holy and incomprehensible, on his living soul. The unseen Hand was laid on him only for a moment. He has not passed half a dozen shop-fronts, and the work is done. He is contrite. Hell is vanquished. All the angels of heaven are in a stir of joy. His soul is beautiful. God is yearning over it with love and with ineffable desire. It needs only one cold touch of death, and an eternity of glory lies with all its vast and spacious realms of Vision before him.

Neither is he simply as the dropping off of sin's chains had left him; but, as if from some secret depth of God's creation, there come back to him, a bright and goodly multitude, the merits of years of grace which had gone from him when he sinned. Moreover, he is clothed in such a nuptial garment of spiritual beauty as would blind the natural eve with its imperial magnificence, and to which all the many-coloured pageants of the world are but as dismal, misty, mournful shadows. Yet this work, so beautiful, so wonderful, so altogether worthy of the Divine Perfections, is not done once only, or now and then, or periodically, or to make an epoch in the world's history; it is being accomplished in a thousand confessionals this day and at this hour, and in churches, in hospitals, in prisons, on shipboard, on the scaffold, in the streets and fields of daily labour, close to the mower, or reaper, or the gardener, or the vine-dresser, who dreams not that God is in his neighbourhood, so busy and at so stupendous a work. For to turn a child of Satan into a son of God is so tremendous a work, that St. Peter Chrysologus says of it, that the angels are astonished, heaven marvels, earth trembles, flesh cannot bear it, ears cannot take it in, the mind cannot reach it, the whole creation is too weak to endure its magnitude,

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and is short of intellect to esteem it rightly, and is afraid of believing it, because it is so much.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 54, 55.

CLXXIX

CONFESSION

What is confession? It is one of our actions. Or rather it is a mixed act, partly by God and partly by man. It belongs, therefore, to the supernatural order. It is an action of immense significance, of superhuman power, and it may be of incalculable worth. The very fact of its combining in itself the agencies of the Creator and the creature, is enough to show us of what value and consequence it is. If a few common actions done perfectly are enough to make saints of us, what may we not say of a few perfect confessions? Yet we go to confession weekly, and are what we are! Literature is a power on earth, and a power in the natural order, whose importance it is not easy to exaggerate. Different nations have had their literatures. Each nation has had various schools of literature at different times. They have stood to the progress of civilization in the double relation of cause and effect. They have stamped epochs. They have been dominant, or nearly dominant, over the manners and morals of their times. They have therefore indirectly decided the eternal destiny of multitudes of individual souls. Yet no one school of literature, nor all its schools put together, can compete with a single good confession in beauty or importance. Philosophies have risen and fallen on the earth, and have reigned successively, and have reigned energetically; and each system thought itself the perfection of the world and the solution of the grand difficulty. Yet the homeliness of one good confession is a better thing than the subtleties of the most profound intellectual system. No revolution, though it may uncrown a king and emancipate a people, is of so much consequence as a good confession, though, alas! it supplies multitudes of souls with superabundant matter for confession. No one must underrate the importance of scientific discoveries. Not only may the wider distribution of comfort and the elevation of the temporal well-being of the world depend upon them, but happiness and morals are often implicitly concerned in them. Yet no discovery that was ever made can compete in real intrinsic importance with a good confession. Nevertheless, all this is a feeble and inadequate way of attaining a true notion of the grandeur of confession.

Confession is an act of faith on the part of the creature. It is also an act of the most concentrated worship. It is a breaking with the world and a turning to God. It is a triumph over millions of evil spirits of huge power and, comparatively with us men, of unbounded intellect. It is the beginning of an eternity of ineffable union with God, and confers the right of beholding the invisible face to face. A man in a state of sin sees in a fellow creature as sinful as himself, perhaps even evidently more unworthy, the form and features and real jurisdiction of the Incarnate Son of God. He kneels at his feet as if he were divine. He narrates to him the most secret shames and hidden sins of his soul. He submits to his questioning as if he were the absolute and ultimate Judge of all the earth. He listens with meekness to his reproof, as if it were God Himself who spoke. He leaves to him the fixing of his punishment. He gives him rights over the arrangement of much of his external life. He makes this narration of his sins with a profound sorrow, a sorrow which is based on no mere human disgrace, or forfeiture of worldly honour, or ruin

of temporal interests. It is not even based only on the fear of divine punishments, without some admixture of divine love. He is sorry with a sorrow, to which neither all the power nor all the wisdom of the world can help him, but which is itself the supernatural gift of God. His sorrow involves a detestation of his past sin, which is another gift of God. It is accompanied also with a firm determination never to offend God again, a determination which chooses between the will of God and the liberty of sin, and elects God's will, whatever cost it may be found to involve. This energetic determination is the thing which he has taken most pains about. Neither has he come to it without study, effort, and diligence. Nevertheless, it is God's gift rather than his own attainment. His act thus completed, with much help and interference on the part of God, God Himself begins His exclusive part. One of His creatures, a fallible as well as himself a guilty judge, pronounces some few words, and straightway, though invisibly and spiritually, there falls from the veins of Jesus a shower of the Precious Blood, shed hundreds of years ago, and resumed three days after it was shed, and bedews the sinner's soul. All his guilt is done away instantaneously. His state is completely changed. Manifold works are done in his soul, such as the re-infusion of certain supernatural habits, the revival of dead merits, and a communication of the divine nature. His change can only be paralleled with that of a devil into an angel. All heaven is stirred at the event. It is the special subject of the angelic jubilee. No angel or saint could have done it, or even have applied it as instruments. It is the immediate action of the Creator on the soul of His creature. This is a modest description of a good confession, kept very much within bounds, and which might have been heightened by many other seemingly miraculous phenomena. In its measure and degree, without the re-infusion of habits and sundry other changes, the same supernatural apparatus attends upon the confession of venial sins. God is not less active, nor grace less mysterious, in the act. Yet this is the act which we with God perform weekly, and are what we are!—"Spiritual Conferences," 229-232.

CLXXX

TWO MISTAKES ABOUT CONFESSION

Some of us get into a way of never looking at confession by itself. To us it is simply part of the preparation for Communion. Of course we know that confession is a sacrament by itself; but we do not know it with an energetic practical knowledge. It is to us practically part of another ceremony. Few people do justice to the mischievous tendency of this mistake. It is fertile in evils to the soul. It even goes to the length of blunting our faith at last. It interferes with our perception of the necessity of grace. It diminishes our motives for loving Jesus, by confusing them. It takes off the edge from our hatred of sin. It operates unfavourably on our humility, by leading us to reflect too much on our privileges and too little on our responsibilities. It even lessens our appreciation of God's goodness, by leading us to dwell on it apart from the sense of our own wretchedness. We must look at confession not as a whole, but as a part. There is a propriety in confession going before Communion. But confession is an awful sacrament in itself, with separate proprieties of its own, deeply to be revered and almost dreaded, because of the tingling realities of its contact with God.

Sometimes, and this is a common fault in converts, people

go to confession only for the purpose of direction. They use a great sacrament merely as a handle or occasion for something else, for another purpose, a good purpose indeed, but a very inferior and subordinate one. Thus, they put aside all thought of the absolution, or rather it does not come to them to think of it. They have probably not taken so much pains with their examination, their sorrow, and their purpose of amendment, as they should have done. They have not realised God's peculiar presence in the confessional, because they have not come to confession as a sacrament. Hence, confession often disappoints them, and they lose their devotion to it as a sacrament. Their irreverence has been unconscious and unintentional; but it has not been the less an irreverence; and they suffer for it in their souls. They have come to talk, or they have come to listen. They have not come to confess. Thus, they confess, not invalidly, but unworthily, not discerning the Precious Blood and its special sacramental dispensation there. Experience shows that there are few things more difficult to implant in converts than a real faith in confession as a sacrament, and a grave humble advertence to the sacramental character of the action in which they are engaged. We must be at great pains in teaching them this, more especially if they have been in the habit of going to confession while they were outside the Church, as it is precisely these persons who take the greatest liberties with the sacrament. This often interferes very seriously with their becoming fervent Catholies. Plainly it is the old leaven still at work: self is the centre, and not God. Direction is more attractive to them than confession — "Spiritual Conferences," 238, 239,

CLXXXI

OBEDIENCE TO ONE'S DIRECTOR

OBEDIENCE to our director is a stumbling-block to many of us. I cannot think it would be so, if we had a clear idea of it, or, which is the same thing, an unexaggerated idea of it. What shall I say to clear your thoughts without lowering them? In the first place, a spiritual director is not a monastic superior. Our obedience to the last must be minute, to the first general. The superior's jurisdiction is universal; the director's only where we invite it, or he asks it and we accord it. The superior commands us unconsulted; the director's commands arise out of our own questions. Nigronius said he never augured well of a man who made his director take the initiative in spiritual direction. The superior turns into precept matters of supererogation; a director must have forgotten himself if he attempts anything of the kind. If we disobey a superior, we sin; it would require very peculiar and unusual circumstances to make disobedience to our director any sin at all.

Now, the wrong use of a right thing is always bad. But the confounding of a spiritual director with a religious superior is fraught with specially pernicious consequences to our souls. If we are living in the world, and aiming at perfection amid the freedom of its distractions and pursuits, our undue subordination to our director is out of keeping with the rest of our life. It is a discord. It is a foreign element, which will cause either corruption or explosion, according to our temperament. It unmans us; and what a host of evils there are in that one word! Moreover, it plays the game of some one or other of the many forms of spiritual idleness, and secretly nourishes our self-love. We

like to think we are obedient, and to feel that we are being governed. It is agreeable to us to live in the bustle of a perpetual spiritual administration. We hold endless cabinet councils, and grow pompous and absurd, uneasy, mysterious, and conceited. We fancy ourselves great people. We magnify our tiny experiences. At last we grow soft, effeminate, sentimental, feverish, and languid. In a great measure it does away with the seriousness of our relations with God, and leads us unawares into a kind of irreverence. We throw things upon our director which we have no power to throw upon any one but God. We lose the sense of God's immediateness, which is the secret of false spirituality, and ends in moral helplessness. . . .

I have seen a geranium brought up from the cellar when the springtime came. It had been a mild winter, and in the warm darkness it had grown, an unwholesome growth! It hung down like a creeper, with lanky whitish-yellow shoots, and miserable jaundiced leaves. The growth had been abundant, and it would not be true to say that the abundance was the only good point about it, for it was the worst point of it all. There was but one course. It was cut down, planted out, and flowered the latest of its brethren that year, and very poorly after all. Such is the soul that has been over-directed; and the springtime is eternity. Alas! in that matter there comes the cutting down, but there cannot come the planting out. I never knew or read of anyone who had a director, and then who suffered because he was too little directed. The souls damaged by over-direction would fill a hospital in any decently large town.—"Growth in Holiness," 312-314, 317, 318.

CLXXXII

DIRECTING ONE'S DIRECTOR

WE let ourselves be deceived by others, by seeking guidance where we expect least contradiction. How honest hearts can be so dishonest as they are, is a mystery which meets us at every turn in the spiritual life, and here is one of the most glaring examples of it. The Church does not oblige us to have spiritual directors. It imposes nothing more upon us than sacramental confession. If we put ourselves under a director, it is our own act. We do it in order to gain some spiritual advantage by it. Who could believe that anyone would go and entangle himself in a whole system of insincerity, and allow himself to be almost irrevocably lost in the bogs and fens of self-deceit, knowing all the while, as he must know, that his intentions are not godly, and his motives not of the right sort? Yet so it is. Men seek spiritual direction, partly that they may be deceived, and partly lest they should be awakened from their self-deceit. They look around. They fix upon the least independent judgment, or the least vigorous judgment, they can discern, and to that judgment they assign their spiritual direction. What they want is a ghostly father who will let them alone, who will hardly ever take the initiative, whose direction will confine itself to words, whose direction will be simply passive, whose yoke will be of outward observances rather than of inward strictness, who will caution rather than rouse, and hold them back rather than spur them forward. Yet, is there any man who has had anything whatever to do with souls, who was ever lucky enough to find one soul in a thousand which needed holding back? Now, if the Church compelled us to have a spiritual director, it is quite intelligible that our clever corruption should seek for some venerable King Log, and set him over itself; but as the whole thing is voluntary, is it not amazing we should take so much trouble for such very unsatisfactory results?

But, let us suppose our spiritual director chosen, how do we behave to him? Do we give him anything like fair play? I ought rather to say, Do we give our own poor souls anything like fair play with him! Can we ever remember having put one single question to him with perfect honesty and thorough straightforwardness? Have we not always shaped it and worded it and emphasized it for some ulterior end? Have we not half made up our own minds on most subjects before we have consulted our guide, and has not our aim rather been to elicit such a verdict as we wish, than to know his calm and dispassionate and uninfluenced judgment? All this is wild work: God being considered, and the soul, and eternal possibilities! In these days of railway frauds we are always hearing of accounts being "cooked." Now, I have no very clear idea of how to "cook" accounts, and should hardly know how to set about it, from want of experience in accounts altogether; but I greatly suspect that what we do with our statements to our spiritual directors is to "cook" them.

Am I bitter and sareastic? If so, I assure you it is with much love and the most earnest of intentions. I feel as if I wanted to do you some good, and could not get at you, as if there were a waving veil of cobwebs between your souls and my hand, and when I strike it, it yields, and waves about, and gets into my own eyes, and there is no tearing it. This is vexatious, and I do not know how far to be serious, lest, being serious, I should become angry also. So, bear with my foolishness. See if I do not say some sensible things in the course of it, which if I had said gravely would have been less sensible. I would give any-

thing to do with you what I want. It would bring you a little nearer God. Do not be annoyed with my frivolous way of doing it. Yet perhaps you had better be a little angry. I am sure to be able to make you think if I can put you moderately out of temper. You are out of temper now, because of what I have said of your intercourse with your directors. It is a sore subject. It is the soreness which has made you angry. But you know very well that your spiritual direction is little better than a farce, and that it is so because of your own ungenuineness with your directors. Most of you had better have no directors than direct your directors so adroitly as you do.—"Spiritual Conferences," 165-168.

CLXXXIII

CHRISTIAN GRAVITY

WE must be upon our guard against two foolish mistakes, which betray an ignorance of the first principles of the interior life, and which nevertheless are not uncommon. The first mistake is the putting lightly away of movements of remorse and inward upbraidings, as if they were mere scruples. Directors, in a hurry to get rid of their penitents, or anxious to keep them calm at all costs, often cast them into this delusion. But it is a serious misfortune as well as a grave mistake. It may be some old root of bitterness which is causing the twinge, or some secret reserve with God which has found voice and is upbraiding us. What shall we lose if we leave these things still in us! Or it may be that our Lord is doing to us something like what we read of various saints, that He is squeezing the last drops of bad blood out of our hearts: and are we to meddle and unclasp the kind firmness of His fingers from the

aching place, when if we knew our own good fortune we should see that that ache is worth kingdoms to us? A cloud is always a cloud; but it is wisdom to know when the cloud that is overshadowing us is the Holy Ghost.

The other mistake is thinking it un-Catholic to take serious and religious views of things. Converts are very liable to this from the ordinary laws of reaction and recoil. So also are priests, seminarists, and religious, as thinking seriousness professional. Levity will not make us happy, and I never read the life of a saint who thought it fine to speak lightly, or who was given to do so. They said little, and what they said was invariably grave. I believe it was their gravity that made them cheerful. There is something undergraduate about this levity. It is partly the conceit and partly the vulgarity of the spiritual life.—"Growth in Holiness," 333, 334.

CLXXXIV

ABIDING SORROW FOR SIN

When we come to look at ourselves, whether it be the rare few who have preserved their baptismal innocence and whose souls are only charged with venial sins, or the great apostles, unrivalled amidst the saints, confirmed in grace, and whose grace was superabundant, or the mass of men whose best estate is that of repentant and returning sinners, we shall see that no sorrow is possible to us which shall unite these four characteristics except the abiding sorrow for sin. It is as much life-long with us as anything can be. It is a prominent part of our first turning to God, and there is no height of holiness in which it will leave us. It is the interior representation of our guardian angel in our souls, and the disposition and

demeanour he would fain should be constant and persevering in us. It is quiet. Indeed, it rather tranquillizes a troubled soul than perturbs a contented one. It hushes the noises of the world, and rebukes the loquacity of the human spirit. It softens asperities, subdues exaggerations, and constrains everything with a sweet and gracious spell which nothing else can equal. It is supernatural, for it has not a natural motive to feed upon. It is all from God and all for God. It is forgiven sin for which we mourn, and not sin which perils self; and this very fact makes it also a fountain of love. We love because much has been forgiven, and we always remember how much it was. We love because the forgiveness has abated fear. We love because we wonder at the compassion that could so visit such unworthiness. We love because the softness of sorrow is akin to the filial confidence of love. Thus abiding sorrow for sin is the only possible parallel in our souls to the mysterious life-long sorrow of Jesus and Mary; and the fact that that sorrow clung to them characteristically in spite of their sinlessness, seems to show how much of the secret life of Christian holiness is hidden in its gentle supernatural melancholy. . . .

It consists in an abiding sense that we are sinners, without at all bringing up to remembrance definite and particular sins. On the contrary, it would not only avoid such a picturing of sins as a matter of prudence, but it would be quite foreign to its genius to think of it. It is too much occupied with God, to do more than fix its eye on self with a touching, patient, reproachful look. It consists also in an undoubting and yet an unceasing prayer for pardon. If it were argumentative, it might say that a sin was either forgiven or was not forgiven, that forgiveness was an instantaneous act, whether it were gratuitous or conditional, and that to ask forgiveness for what is forgiven

is to approach God with unmeaning words. But David gives it a voice, "Amplius lava me," "Wash me more and more, O Lord"; and the whole Church throughout the world has adopted his *Miserere*, and is continually upon her knees, crying, "Amplius lava me." Oh, how the soul yearns for that "Amplius"! Theologians tell us that the fires of purgatory do not, amid their other severely benignant offices, burn the stains of sin out of our souls, because in truth there are no stains there; the Precious Blood obliterated them in the act of forgiving them. Still there are the fires. So there are the fires of that "Amplius" in the soul. It is a thing to be felt rather than accounted for, to be cherished rather than defined.

It consists also in a dread of forgiven sin, not so much because of purgatory, though it is far from affecting to be above these mixed and lower motives -poor soul! how should it venture to believe itself above anything!-but because of the way in which old habits revive, and the species of old sins haunt the imagination, making it often, to use the forcible words of Scripture, like a cage of unclean birds. It dare not go to sleep with the seemingly dead enemy by its side. Through the cold night and on the strewn battle-field it wakes and watches, and in a low voice sings the triumphs of grace that it may repel the approaches of slumber. It consists also in a growing hatred of sin. This growing hatred is a different thing from the startled horror of our conversion to God, when He tore the mask off its face and turned the fierce full light of His Spirit upon it, exhibiting its loathsome deformity and preternatural hideousness to our soul, which trembled under the idea of His judgments, while our flesh was freezingly pierced with His sharp chastising fears. That hour has passed away. It was a baptism, but He held us in His arm while He baptized us, and we did not perish. But it is an increase of the spirit of Gethsemane in our souls, a communication from that solitary mystery beneath the olive-trees, when even apostles slept. It is the Sacred Heart touching our hearts, and leaving faint stigmata of His own life-long sorrow upon them.

It consists in a growing sensitiveness of conscience as to what is sin. Ineffably bright as is the sanctity of God and His refulgent glory, to gaze upon it strengthens our soul's eye rather than dazzles it. We see more clearly what is imperfect, unworthy, and dishonourable in our actions. We discern the complication and mixture of motives more distinctly. Entangled in a confusion of infirmities, a very inevitability of imperfections, where self-love can find no single resting-place for the sole of its foot, we grow in a divine sadness, which humility and faith will not allow to be disquietude. With all this, and in the way of consequence, our personal love of our Blessed Lord increases, and love of Him as our actual Saviour from sin. It is our joy to "call His Name Jesus, because He saveth His people from their sins."—"Growth in Holiness," 325, 326, 327-329.

CLXXXV

SORROWING FOR OTHERS' SIN

You may say: sorrowing for other men's sins is all very well for saints; we know the saints have done so; but it is a thing rather to be admired than imitated; it is above us; it would be an injudicious practice in us; we do not half sorrow for our own sins yet; we must not go so quick; we must learn a little more of that first. Alas! do not make such an objection as this. Let me take you on your own ground. You have not, you say, half enough sorrow

for your own sins. There is nothing you regret so much as this, nothing which seems to you more uncomfortable and unpromising in your spiritual life. But why have you not more sorrow? Because you look more at sin as it affects the interests of your own soul than as it affects the interests of God. I do not mean to say you are not to look at it in that way-God forbid! You must do the one, but you must not leave the other undone. Now, if you look at sin simply as it regards your own reward and punishment, it is clear you will never get an adequate hatred of sin; for your punishment is far from being the chief evil of sin. Its chief evil is its outrage of the majesty of God; and if you could see it in this light, you would have a much keener sorrow for your own sins than you have. But then, in order to see it in this light, you must learn to look with an eye of sorrow on the sins of others; for there you have no interest of your own, there you are contemplating simply the injured glory of our Heavenly Father. Thus, in order to sorrow more deeply and more effectually for your own sins, you must mourn, for God's dear sake, over the sins of others.—" All for Jesus," 63, 64,

CLXXXVI

HOW TO SERVE GOD

ALONG the line of Sacred History there gleam like lights the dreadful chastisements which God has inflicted on venial sins. Moses, and David, the man of God whom the lion slew, and Oza who upheld the swaying Ark—these examples are overwhelming disclosures of the sanctity of God; and the notable thing is, that what seems to anger God in these faults is the want of wholeness of heart with

Him. Let us look at our past lives by this light, and have we not cause to tremble? or even at our present practice, and have we a right to be without fear? What a thought for us that He knows at this moment how we are to stand to all eternity, what pains we are to endure, or what bliss we shall enjoy. It is enough to take away our breath to know that this is known, even though we still are free. Surely nothing can be conceived more awful than having to deal with God.

What then follows from this? Undoubtedly nothing less than these four simple truths.

- 1. That His service is not only our most important, but our sole work. This is so obvious that it requires only to be stated. Time and words would alike be wasted in the attempt to prove it. Yet, alas! even spiritual persons need to be reminded of this elementary truth. Let us subject ourselves to a brief examination upon it. Are we thoroughly convinced it is true? Has our past life shown proof of it? Is our present life modelled upon it? Are we taking pains that our future life shall be so? What is the result, when we compare our worldly promptitude and industry with our preference of the service of God over all other things? Are we in any way on the look out for His greater glory or our own greater union with Him? Is it plain at first sight, that we have no object or pursuit so engrossing and so decidedly paramount as the service of God ?
- 2. That the spirit in which we serve Him should be entirely without reserve. Need I prove this? What is, to be reserved? Can there be reserves with God? Can His sovereignty be limited, or our love of Him ever reach the measure of enough? But have we no reserve with Him now? Is there really no corner of our heart over which He is not absolute Lord? Does He ask of us freely

what He wills, and do we do our best to give Him all He asks? Have we no implicit bargain or condition with Him that He is only to go so far with us and no further? Is our outward life utterly and unconditionally dependent on Him? And if it is, is the kingdom of our inward intentions reposing peaceably beneath His unquestioned sceptre?

- 3. That our ruling passion should be horror of sin, even venial sin, and unworthy imperfections. Now, do we so much as know what this feeling means? When we read of it in spiritual books, does it not sound to us like an unreal exaggeration? Have we ever heartily prayed for an increased hatred of sin? Are there not many evils which afflict us far more keenly? Are we attracted to Gethsemane and to the mysterious vision of our Master crushed, like the grapes in a winepress, beneath the mental horror of the world's sins? Until we know something of this horror of sin, supernatural principles can hardly be said to have taken possession of our minds.
- 4. That we should avoid, as if it were sacrilege, any slovenliness in our dealings with God. Surely the terror of His majesty, as well as the immensity of His love, should make this one of our fundamental axioms. There is a personal contempt about slovenliness, which makes it perfectly horrible to couple even the idea of it with God. It is far more truly a practical atheism, than many gross sins into which the vehemence of our guilty passions may betray us. Yet how do matters stand with our meditation, vocal prayer, Mass, confession, and Communion? And if it be so with our directly spiritual duties, what shall be said of those occupations of our calling, out of which we are to work our salvation, and which can only be sanctified by extreme purity of intention?

It follows then, that the only one fact of any special

importance to us is whether we are honestly serving God or not. Shall we be saved or not? The whole of life's solemnity and seriousness resolves itself into that one overwhelming doubt. We should have nothing so much at heart as this. Nay, rather, we should have nothing at heart but this. How dead to self we should soon become under the shadow of this universal, life-long question! Yet how does the case really stand? A little wrong, a trifling injustice, an insulting word, a piquing of our self-love and personal vanity, stirs us more effectually and interests us more really than the chances of being lost or saved. Yet we are aiming at a devout life! Yet we dream that we are serving God!—"Growth in Holiness," 35-38.

CLXXXVII

MORTIFICATION

WE must remember that, according to the teaching of Scripture, it is quite a mistake to regard, as some unthinkingly do, the practice of mortification as a counsel of perfection and a work of supererogation.

When carried to a certain degree or when expressed in certain ways, it is doubtless so. But mortification in itself, and to a certain degree and under given circumstances, is of precept, and necessary to salvation. This is not only true of the self-inflicted pains which are sometimes of obligation in order to overcome vehement temptations, or of those various mortifications which are needful in order to avoid sin; but a definite amount of fasting and abstinence, irrespective of the temptations or circumstances of individuals, is imposed by the Church on all her children, under pain of mortal sin. This expresses the idea

of penance for its own sake, and the necessity of it as one of the functions of the Church as a soul-saving institute. When, therefore, men say that they do not practise mortification, but leave it to those who wish to be saints, they may on being questioned show that they are sound in doctrine, and do not mean the error which their words, strictly taken, imply; but we may be sure that the very use of such loose language is a proof, that a real error about mortification is deeply imbedded in their minds.

Indeed modern luxury and effeminacy, which are often pleaded as arguments for an abatement of mortification, may just as well be called forward to maintain the opposite view. For if it be a special office of the Church to bear witness against the world, her witness must especially be borne against the reigning vices of the world; and therefore in these days, against effeminacy, the worship of comfort, and the extravagances of luxury. I believe, if this unhappy land is ever to be converted, of which there are many hopes and no signs, it will be by some religious order or orders who shall exhibit to a degraded and vicious people the vision of evangelical poverty in its sternest perfection. The land that has forsaken Christ must gather to the Baptist first, and be attracted to the Jordan by the simplicity of supernatural strictness and antique austerity. Other things can do much, intellect, learning, eloquence, the beauties of Catholic charity, the sweet influences of a purified literature, the studiousness of a simple and apostolic preaching. But the great work, if the great work is in the counsels of God, I much think is a triumph in this land reserved only for evangelical poverty. Not poverty in the grotesque attire of the mediæval practice, once allowed, but which would repel men now and invite contempt, because of certain developments separable from its real self and at present unseasonable, but the beautiful poverty of the apostles and first ages of the Church, with the common garb and bright clean face and hands of evangelical austerity (St. Matt. vi. 17).

If the Church has to witness always against the reigning vices of the world, each soul has likewise, if not to witness, at least to defend itself, against them. But how shall it defend itself against the worship of bodily comforts except by depriving itself of them? Changeable as the world is, it is unchanging too. The world, the flesh, and the devil are practically the same in all ages: and so, practically, mortification has the same offices to perform. Whether we consider the soul in the struggles of its conversion, in the progress of its illumination, or in its variously perfect degrees of union with God, we shall find that bodily mortifications have their own place and their own proper work to do, and are literally indispensable.

But let us look for a moment at the various objections urged against this. First, we are told that the health of the world is not what it was, and that if there is an equal, or even greater longevity, the normal state of health is more uniformly valetudinarian, and that, if inflammatory attacks are less frequent, nervous complaints are more prevalent, and that the relaxation of Church discipline on the subject shows her appreciation of these facts. All this is true, and doubtless many most important deductions are to be drawn from it. Still I maintain, it is more concerned with the kind of mortification than the degree. The conduct of the Church in the mitigation of fasting is as wise as the conduct of Leo XII, was marked with the usual practical sagacity of the Holy See, when he caused the possibilities of the old observance of Lent to be medically investigated. Moreover, the plea of health, while it is always to be listened to, is to be listened to with suspicion. We must always be jealous of the side on which nature and self are serving as volunteers. Great, then, as we must admit the consequences of a state of valetudinarianism to be on the spiritual life, a general and plenary dispensation from corporal austerities is not one of them; and we must remember also that our forefathers, who troubled their heads little enough about their nerves, and had no tea to drink, were accustomed to hear from Father Baker, who only gave utterance to the old mystical tradition, that a state of robust health was positively a disqualification for the higher stages of the spiritual life.

A second objection, and one sometimes urged in behalf of priests and religious, is that modern hard work is a substitute for ancient penance. The fewness of the clergy and the multitude of souls have certainly brought upon the ecclesiastics of this generation an overwhelming pressure of work; and it is true of them, as it always has been of religious orders engaged in the apostolate, that the measure of bodily austerity to be exacted of them is very different from that which we expect from contemplatives and solitaries. I do not say therefore, that this objection expresses no truth, but only that it will not bear all the weight men put upon it. Certain kinds of penance are incompatible with hard work; while at the same time the excessive exterior propensities, which hard work gives us, are so perilous to the soul, that certain other kinds of penance are all the more necessary to correct this disturbing force. All great missionaries, Segneri and Pinamonti, Leonard of Port Maurice and Paul of the Cross, have worn instruments of penance. The penalties of life, as Da Ponte calls them, are doubtless an excellent penance when endured with an interior spirit, and worth far more than a hundred self-inflicted pains. Yet he who maintains that the endurance of the former is a dispensation from the infliction of the latter, will find himself out of harmony

with the whole stream of approved spiritual teaching in the Church; and the brevity of his perseverance in the interior life will soon show both himself and others the completeness of his delusion. Without bodily penance, zealous apostolic work hardens the heart far more than it sanctifies it.

A third class of objectors tells us to be content with the trials God sends us, which are neither few nor light. If they told us that the gay suffering and graceful welcome of these dispensations were of infinitely greater price than the sting of the discipline or the twinge of the catenella, most true and most important would the lesson be, and to many a hot-hearted spiritual suckling quite indispensable. Youth, when it is strong and well and is full of fervour and bathing in devotional sweetness, finds almost a physical pleasure in tormenting its flesh and pinching its redundant health. There is little merit in this, as there is little difficulty and less discretion. At all times one blow from God is worth a million from ourselves. But the objectors fall into that mistake of exaggeration which runs through so many spiritual books. Because A is more important than B, they jump to the conclusion that B is of no importance at all. Because the mortifications which God sends us are more efficacious and less delusive, if rightly taken, than the mortifications we inflict upon ourselves, it does not follow but that these last are, not only an important, but even an indispensable element in the spiritual life. We may answer them briefly as follows. Yes! the best of all penances is to take in the spirit of interior compunction the mortifications which the wise and affectionate course of God's fatherly providence brings upon us; but, unless we have practised ourselves in the generous habit of voluntary penances, the chances are very much indeed against our forming this interior spirit of penance, and therefore of

getting the full profit out of the involuntary trials God sends us.

Besides these objections, there is another one latent in many minds, which should be noticed. Our present habits of life and thought lead to an obvious want of sympathy with contemplation. It has no public results on which we can look complacently, or which we can parade boastfully. Everything seems waste which is not visible; and all is disappointment which is not plain success. It is supernatural principles especially which are at a discount in modern days. Now, it is easy to see how this want of sympathy with contemplation leads to a misappreciation of austerity. The two things are connected with each other, and both enter deeply into the region of supernatural operations. To think lightly of either is to be out of harmony with the mind of the Church, and to injure our own soul, whatever may be its vocation, by narrowing the range of its supernatural vision.

From all these considerations it may warrantably be concluded, that there is nothing in modern times to dispense us either from the obligation or the counsel of bodily mortification, that on the contrary there is much in modern habits to enforce the obligation and to urge the counsel, and that all the modifications, to which the actual circumstances of modern life point, concern themselves wholly with the kind of mortification and not at all with the degree.—" Growth in Holiness," 140-145.

CLXXXVIII

THE RIGHT VIEW OF OUR FAULTS

The sweetest of all the sweet doctrines which St. Francis of Sales was inspired to teach us, was that which regarded

the right view of our own faults. The consideration of it falls very naturally into this place. On the one hand we have got clear views of temptations and of scruples, and on the other a perception of the necessity of an abiding sorrow for sin. That sorrow, as we now understand it, can be no source of scruples, but a right view of our own faults must fall in with and be a part of it. Unfortunately our faults form a great portion of ourselves, and it is plain that the management of them can be no slight affair in the spiritual life, and that our management of them depends very much upon the view we take of them.

Indeed much of life depends upon taking right views of things. Time is saved. Mistakes are hindered. Sometimes we chance upon a short road to heaven; not that the short roads are always the easiest; strictly speaking, none are short and none are easy; but they may be comparatively so among themselves, and all are full of pleasantness and peace. What do we most abound in? Certainly, in faults. Perhaps a right view of them may be a short road to heaven. It will at all events help us to make a road of what looks like a series of barriers.

If a good person were asked to give an account of himself, it would probably be somewhat after the following fashion.

I am constantly doing things which are wrong in themselves. It is not that I do them on purpose or with forethought. I hope I do not commit any venial sin deliberately. It is the great object of my life, next to loving God, to avoid that. Yet neither on the other hand can I say that my falls are altogether surprises. They seem so at the time, but not when I come to look back upon them. The sense of guilt grows upon me in the retrospect, rather than reproaches me at the moment. But, worst of all, I see no visible improvement in myself in this matter. Again,

parallel with the stream of life. I believe I have never done a good work in my life. A spoiled good work is my

highest point.

But in prayer I am quite a different person. I seem to have entered another world. I am at my ease and at large. The aspirations of the saints appear to be mine. Desires of suffering, an appetite for calumny, tremendous penances, ardent resolutions, heroic deeds, all rush upon me at once, and express precisely what I am feeling most strongly in my interior life. Bold words, from which at other times I should have shrunk with reverence, fill my prayers. I plead the rights of saints, and urge their petitions, and demean myself as if I was one. And all this before God! I do not mean to be insincere. I feel, or I fancy I feel, what I am saving. Yet when I come back to the level of my daily practice, I feel as if my prayer had been all an hypocrisy from beginning to end. I wish I could think that it were not so. There is no sort of proportion between my prayer and my practice. The first is always running ahead of the last, and so absurdly far ahead!

For, when I come to practice, generosity in suffering is just what I cannot realise; and as to mortifications, they are simply to me what punishments are to a child. It would be as surprising to others as it is humiliating to myself, if I were to mention what little things I do for God, and what a laborious effort it takes to do them, and what immense pain it is. How I complain, and tremble, and put it off, and hunt for a justifiable dispensation, and

sink back into comfortable spirituality, as soon as the momentary effort is over! The revelations I could make of my own pusillanimity would be almost incredible. But I was grand at prayer in the morning, grand as a martyr at the block in front of one of my own castles in the air.

The upshot of the whole is, that I seem to myself to be getting worse and going back. My sensible fervours have gone, and I do not see that they have left formed habits behind them. I wish I could name any one imperfection that I could say had been effectually weeded out, or any one venial sin, whose crowded ranks had been thinned, or that I could show anything beyond a scratch here and there on my ruling passion. All that I can see is that I make as much effort as I used to do, perhaps more, but apparently with less effect.

Now, is a person who gives such an account of himself in a good way? Let me think. On the whole, Yes!-I found my judgment on two things: the evident desire for perfection with which he began, and the fact of continued effort with which he ended. Starting then with these two things, he may reasonably take a consoling view of the rest. But let us speak of ourselves. Our faults are very numerous and very great: true. But is there anything to surprise us in them? From our own knowledge of ourselves, and from what we know of the measure of our grace, are they not what might have been expected? At times we have thought of our future humbly and prudently; was it very different from what has actually taken place? The fact is that neither in the kind, nor in the degree of our faults, is there anything astonishing: and if nothing astonishing, then nothing discouraging. But this is not going far enough. There is something astonishing, and the astonishing thing is that our faults have not been greater. When we weigh ourselves against our

temptations, our estimate of things is very different. How unlike ourselves we have happily been in many things! This can be nothing less than the work of grace. Instead of being peevish because we have been so bad, the wonder is that we have been so good, and the fear is lest we should be elated by seeing it.

Common-sense also has a word or two to say on the matter. The faults are committed. They have done their harm, and gone to God. There is no good in being cast down. There is much good in not being so. There is no good in being cast down; for the faults cannot be recalled. We may fidget about the circumstances, and worry ourselves by thinking how easily the evil might have been avoided. But the fault itself lost us some of our peace; why should we now lose more in self-vexation? Discouragement, moreover, is no part of genuine penance. It atones for nothing, satisfies for nothing, merits nothing, impetrates nothing. It does not make us more careful next time: rather the opposite, for, by dejecting us it makes us at once more open to temptation and less masculine in resisting it. But on the contrary there is much good in not being cast down. We shall be less teased with the imperfection in ourselves, and more occupied with the infidelity to God. To fall and not be out of spirits with the fall is not only to keep the courage we had, but to gain more. It is the humblest course, and on that account the most acceptable to God. It is the most reasonable, and therefore has the greater blessing.

Sometimes a saint gives us a new thought, which for what we can see is not to be found in any of the spiritual writers before him. It is his contribution to the tradition. When he has said it, it sounds so commonplace that we wonder we never thought of it for ourselves, like the sayings of all great minds. Such a thought is that of St.

Francis of Sales, the man of many new thoughts, when he taught us that if in the spiritual life we often fall without perceiving it, so it must be true that we as often get up again without perceiving it. It sounds like a pleasantry; but if a man who has the infelicitous habit of disquieting himself about his faults, would once in a way take it for the subject of his hour's meditation, he would suck from it the very marrow of spiritual wisdom.—"Growth in Holiness," 335-339.

CLXXXIX

FAILURE AND SUCCESS

I RECKON failure to be the most universal unhappiness on earth. Almost everybody and everything are failures, failures in their own estimation, even if they are not so in the estimation of others. Those optimists, who always think themselves successful are few in number, and they for the most part fail in this at least, namely, that they cannot persuade the rest of the world of their success; and this is in itself the most provoking of failures. Philanthropy can plainly do nothing here, even if it were inclined to try. But philanthropy is a branch of moral philosophy, and would turn away in disdain from an unhappiness, which it could prove to be unreasonable, even while it acknowledged it to be universal. It is simply true that few men are successful; and of those few it is rare to find any who are satisfied with their own success. The multitude of men live with a vexatious sense that the promise of their lives remains unfulfilled. Either outward circumstances have been against them, or they have been misappreciated, or they have got out of their grooves unknowingly, or they have been the victims of injustice. What must all life be but a

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feverish disappointment, if there be no eternity in view? The religious man is the only successful man. Nothing fails with him. Every shaft reaches the mark, if the mark be God. He has wasted no energies. Every hope has been fulfilled beyond his expectations. Every effort has been even disproportionately rewarded. Every means has turned out marvellously to be an end, because it had God in it, who is our single end. In piety every battle is a victory, simply because it is a battle. The completest defeats have somewhat of triumph in them; for it is a positive triumph to have stood up and fought for God at all. In short, no life is a failure which is lived for God; and all lives are failures which are lived for any other end. If it is part of any man's disposition to be peculiarly and morbidly sensitive to failure, he must regard it as an additional motive to be religious. Pietv is the only invariable, satisfactory, genuine success.—"The Precious Blood," 56, 57.

CXC X

YET all this is not after men's measures nor according to their standard. The appearance of things is as if everywhere the Flight into Egypt were being enacted, and God was a fugitive before the face of His own pursuing creatures. It is as if He took up post after post in His own creation, and fortified Himself there as if He should abide; and he is besieged and His fort taken, and He retires to another; and again the same mysterious drama follows. Thus, God seems perpetually falling back and falling back, further and further, in His own kingdom, while we, His creatures, usurp His crown, and hold His territory against His will,

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as if we were an army of occupation, gradually turning our conquest into a peaceful right. This is the aspect under which God vouchsafes to let things appear. It is man's obvious way of reading history. Apparent defeat, the semblance of frustration, lies like an intense mist over the ground of God's holiest operations. Were it not for simple, joyous, childlike faith, the clearest eye might quail, the stoutest heart tremble, before this astounding spectacle of a defeated God. All nature and all grace, all angels and all men, all creation and all redemption, gathered into one point and so disclosed to men, and lo! that one point is a skull-strewn Calvary with the dead Christ upon the Cross! We sometimes boast of human freedom, and want men to weigh their words more sparingly when they speak of the sovereignty of God; but with this view before us, let us look over the wide weltering sea of human liberty, and are we not afraid to behold it so stormy, and to know it to be so free? Then what wilt thou do, poor human heart, thus frightened? Take the sweet thought of the dear sovereignty of God, and make a nest therein, and never leave it all life long. Sweetly shalt thou rest, and safely too, head, heart, and hand, and all, while the tempests howl and the billows foam, if only thou art cradled in all simplicity on the sovereignty of the God of Victories!-"The Blessed Sacrament," 358, 359.

CXCI

THE USES OF CHRISTIAN JOY.

THERE are some who have said that joy is a more shallow thing than sorrow. Surely this is not a just view to take of God's creation, even since the fall. Truly joy is undermost, and sorrow is uppermost; but from this very cause joy is the deeper of the two. The heart of the spiritual world, where its central fires are, is deepest joy. The world of sorrow rests upon it, as on its secure foundation. As under every stone there is moisture, so under every sorrow there is joy; and when we come to understand life rightly, we see that sorrow is after all but the minister of joy. We dig into the bosom of sorrow to find the gold and precious stones of joy. Sorrow is a condition of time, but joy is the condition of eternity. All sorrow lies in exile from God; all joy lies in union with Him. In heaven joy will cast out sorrow, whereas there is not a lot on earth from which sorrow has been able altogether to banish joy. Joy clings to us as creatures of God. It adheres to us wherever we go. Its fragrance is palpable about us. Its sunshine lights upon us, and gives us some sort of attractiveness above that which is our own. Joy hangs about everything which God has had to do with. There is only one place where there is no joy, and that dark region is under a special law of its own, and is darkness because it would not be light. There is an inevitable joyousness about all that belongs to God.

We are angry with ourselves because we do not sorrow long enough for our dead. We think it almost a wrong to the memory of those we loved. But it is the elasticity of life. Our hearts bound upwards, because God is above. We cannot help ourselves. The very purling of our blood in our veins is joyous, because life is a gift direct from God. In truth joy and sorrow are not contradictories. Sorrow is the settling of joy, the foil of joy, the shadow which softens joy, the gloom which makes the light so beautiful, the night which causes each morning to have the gladness of a resurrection. They live together, because they are sisters. Joy is the elder-born, and when the younger dies, as she will die, joy will keep a memory of her about her for evermore, a memory which will be very gracious, so gracious as to be part of the bliss of heaven.

There are souls too in the world which have the gift of finding joy everywhere, and of leaving it behind them when they go. Joy gushes from under their fingers, like jets of light. There is something in their very presence, in their mere silent company, from which joy cannot be extricated and laid aside. Their influence is an inevitable gladdening of the heart. It seems as if a shadow of God's own gift had passed upon them. They give light without meaning to shine; and coy hearts, like the bashful insects, come forth, and almost lay aside their sad natures, and weave dances in the golden beams of these bright natures. Somehow too the joy all turns to God. Without speaking of Him, it preaches Him. Its odour is as the odour of His presence. It leaves tranquillity behind, and not unfrequently sweet tears of prayer. All things grow silently Christian under its reign. It brightens, ripens, softens, transfigures, like the sunlight, the most improbable things which come within its sphere. A single gifted heart like this is the apostle of its neighbourhood. Every one acknowledges its divine right, which it never thinks of claiming. There is no need to claim it; for none resists its unconquerable gentleness.

Joy is like a missioner who speaks of God; sorrow is a preacher who frightens men out of the deadliness of sin into the arms of their heavenly Father, or who weans them by the pathos of his reasoning from the dangerous pleasures of the world. These bright hearts are more like the first than the second. They have a great work to do for God; and they do it often most when they realise it least. It is the breath they breathe, and the star they were born under, and the law which encircles them. They have a

light within them, which was not delusive when they were young, and which age will only make more golden without diminishing its heat. To live with them is to dwell in a perpetual sunset of unboisterous mirth and placid gaiety. Who has not known such souls? Who has not owed all that is best in him, after grace, to such as these? Happy is he who had such for the atmosphere of his parental home! Its glory may have sunk beneath the horizon; but he himself will be illuminated by its glow until the hour comes for his own pensive setting. Of a truth he is the happiest, the greatest, and the most godlike of men, as well as the sole poet among men, who has added one true joy to the world's stock of happiness.—"Bethlehem," 395-397.

CXCII

THE APOSTOLATE OF SORROW

Sorrow is the substance of man's natural life, and it might almost be defined to be his natural capability of the supernatural. Joy is but a thin shade, except when it is in alternation with sorrow. The power of art is in the sorrowful. No poetry finds its way into a nation's mind, or can dwell there, unless it have a burden of sorrow in it. To glorify sorrow is one of the highest functions of song, of sculpture, or of painting. Nothing has a lasting interest for men which is not in some way connected with sorrow. All that is touching, pathetic, dramatic, in man's life has to do with sorrow. Sorrow is the poetry of a creation which is fallen, of a race which is in exile, in a vale of tears closed in at the end by the sunless defile of death. Religion has rather added to all this than taken from it.

Our sorrow is now more purely sorrow since gloom and

despair have been chased away from it. We have been redeemed by sorrow. The mysteries of our Lord are chiefly mysteries of sorrow. Our Lady is the Mother of woes. The offices and ceremonies of the Church incline rather to be pensive than to be triumphant. Joy on earth is confessedly for a time. It rises out of sorrow, and it falls back upon it again. All devotion has an element of softness in it, which, if it is not sorrow, is at least akin to it and congenial to it. Sympathy is the bond of hearts, and all sympathy has some of the blood of sorrow in its veins. While joy often jars upon our spirits, sorrow hardly ever seems misplaced, even when it is unwelcome.

The old mystics spoke of two kinds of men, the solar and the lunar. Some were in occult sympathy with the sun, and were ruled by its mysterious influences. Their temperament and their intellect bore some analogy to the character of the sun. Their power of working, their way of work, and the kind of work they chose, were all under the influence of his sovereign beam. Their very diseases were supposed to arise from some malignity of the solar ray, which settled by preference on certain members of the body rather than others. Then there were others who went through life almost as if there were no sun, or at least who quietly used its material light, as a lamp which Providence had placed at their disposal. But they were under equal subjection to the moon, and her wayward beam of cold nocturnal silver played upon their sensitive frames and their responsive souls, as the winds play upon an eolian harp. So there are men in the world who are better for joy, who are humbled by its sweetness, and expand under its shining; and on the other hand there are men who are better for sorrow, and to whom it is the altogether necessary atmosphere of goodness. These last outnumber the first by many millions. The souls, whom joy nurtures in holiness,

are so completely the exceptional cases, that for the multitude of hearers or of readers we may speak as if all men were at home with sorrow, and lived with it as with their guardian angel.

There are some men to whom sorrow teaches all things and to whom also sorrow is the sole revelation. They can only learn by sorrow. They do not understand any other language. They are not capable of taking in any other experience. What is clear as light they cannot see, until the shadow of sorrow has fallen upon it. We come across these men daily on our way through life. There are others who go further than this. They are men who can only work in the shade of some supposed impending catastrophe. They feel always that they are walking into a darkness and down a gulf, and the belief cheers them, and the darkness recedes and the gulf travels backwards, but their idea of them both is the mainspring of their activity and power. Others who can do without sorrow in other things, cannot do without it in their religion. It becomes to them their fear, their reverence, and their love. It is the fountain of their devotion, and the stimulus of their duty. They find sorrow in all the mysteries of Jesus, no matter how joyful or glorious they may be. Sorrow is the condition of all their heavenly-mindedness. Sorrow converted them; sorrow perfects them; sorrow is their final perseverance.

It is in these sorrow-sainted men that life sometimes appears to faint, as if it must needs end before the harbour of death is visible; and then they are strangely, and to our eyes supernaturally, as if they were heaven's favourites, refreshed by gales from the other world, like the land-winds that came fraught with the fragrance of the sassafras to Columbus and his faltering erew. There are other men whose characters are only brought out by sorrow, timid, feminine natures, whose true grandeur is as little suspected

by themselves as it is by those around them. From outward circumstances or from inward shrinking, sometimes it may even be from indolence, they have left their own nature unexplored. They are like the unadventurous dwellers among the hills, who have no true idea of the vastness of that mountain-range upon whose outskirts they have pitched their tents, and who never suspect how the valleys fall back upon each other, and wind inward like the convolutions of a mighty shell. It needs a storm to tell them this, and then the thunder makes trumpets of the glens, and reveals to them by its rolling echoes the inaccessible recesses of the inner mountains. So it is with these men. The cry of sorrow goes forth in their soul, and its echoes come trembling up from depths of which they never dreamed. Others there are whom sorrow shames into goodness. Too much happiness often makes men prematurely old, by anticipating the passive tranquillity of weariness and years, while sorrow, especially if it comes in the shape of disappointment, thrusts middle life back into youth, by keeping alive an activity always fretful and mostly persevering. They are in general the youngest-looking men in mind and heart, who come latest in life to that which they have lived for. It is sorrow which tows them into harbour at the last. . . .

Then there are others who are always wishing life away. Our own hearts go along with these. We leave no place, however beautiful, however endeared to us by a thousand recollections, so much with regret as with the feeling wherewith a man turns away from an enemy he has beaten, and with whom he has no more to do. So much at least is past. So much is over. Another chapter is done. Another step is taken, which, thanks to Heaven! is an irrevocable progress elsewhere. Such men's associations even are prophecies of the future rather than reminiscences

of the past. Their scenery is in heaven. It is their native land, and the yearnings of their love of country tend only there. Their local attachments are rooted in invisible homes. Their very unrealities are not idle regrettings of the past, but calentures of heaven. Such are men to whom all presents are weary, because all presents are sorrowful. But, by way of compensation, to the same men all pasts are presents, and no futures are disquieting. Thus it is that, in one way or in another, we have nearly all made our professions of its faith, and are all picking our way heavenward as best we can, under that softly-stern vicariate of Christ, the apostolate of sorrow.—"Bethlehem," 335-338, 340.

CXCIII

"THE UNLEAVENED BREAD OF SINCERITY AND TRUTH"

ALTHOUGH simplicity is the most inimitable of the divine perfections, nevertheless the imitation of it is an essential part of holiness, and hence it is now presented to us in the Gospel as "the simplicity which is in Christ." Simplicity aims at one end, seeks one object, is occupied with one work, and loves with singleness of heart. In its relations with God, it puts away all multitude, all capriciousness, all distraction, all attachment; and its strength lies in its unity of purpose and its concentration of effort. In its relations with others, it is gentle, open, fair, without disguise, without insincerity, without flattery, without deceit. Now, the more crowded and artificial the world becomes, obviously the more difficult is the practice of simplicity; for it is the reflection of the immutable and spotless truth of God Himself. Scripture reveals to us quite in startling language the intensity of God's hatred of a lie. But there are hundreds of things which do not amount to lies, yet which are contrary to the beautiful perfection of simplicity. There is a speech and a silence, there are looks, manners, permissions, concealments, dubious smiles, pretended inadvertences, unworthy conventions, and intentional distractions, which grieve the Holy Spirit, and make sad ravages of an interior soul, though they are far short of absolute falsehood.

I think it is St. Augustine who says somewhere, that the devil so envied God the possession of His beloved Word, that he strove to mimic the eternal generation of the Son and to produce a word himself, which should be as far as was in his power consubstantial with himself, and that he straightway begot a lie; so that a lie is the devil's word, a daring, foul, and loathsome imitation of the ever-glorious and only-begotten Son of God. This explains the intensity of God's hatred of a lie. Then the saint, or the old Italian commentator in whose book I found it long ago, goes on to say, perhaps more piously than theologically, that God made lying to be but a venial sin, in order to destroy its empire and degrade its power, and because of the facility of the sin and the pressure of the temptations, and in contempt for Satan's craft. This is an exposition of our Lord's name for the devil, the father of lies.

Now, all this may be recommended to the notice even of spiritual persons. They offend God and do themselves a mischief by untruth, not in the shape of falsehood, but in the shape of want of simplicity. If you would be perfect, you must be truthful to a scruple. A hair's breadth of deceit must be to you as if it were a mile of positive untruth. Persons professing to aim at a life of union with God, and whose discretion fails of being supernatural because it falls short of simplicity, are sometimes heard to quote what writers of moral theology teach about the per-

missions of equivocations, amphibology, and mental reserve. I wish it could be rudely forced home upon them how shocking this is! Moral theology is not a system of ascetics, or a code of the counsels of perfection. The writers are engaged in showing either what is the very least of good dispositions on which we may rest a reluctant absolution, so as to attract sinners more powerfully to God, and to advance the kingdom of Christ to the furthest confines of sheer possibility, and to carry the Precious Blood to the uttermost limit to which it will go; or else they are occupied in explaining, for the guidance of the priest, how far an action may be imperfect, and what amount of unworthiness it may contain, without being an absolute breach of any of God's laws, and so subjecting the offender to certain spiritual punishments and disabilities. might as well model their kindliness to the poor, sick, and sorrowing around them on the manual of a Justice of the Peace, as practise spirituality on a treatise of moral theology. Forgive my repeating it. Get out of these little untruthfulnesses. When a man says in defence of himself, It is not a sin he is making a public profession of abandoning the pursuit of perfection. Remember the maxim of a holy man: "Le grand obstacle du progrès spirituel est de ne s'abstenir que de ce qui paroît offense de Dieu, et de faire sans scrupule ce qui se peut faire sans crime."

Furthermore, while I am saying so much as this, I will venture to say somewhat more. Some of the best writers say that, when equivocations and mental reserves, even where we seem in strictness to have a right to use them, are so against the custom and genius of a country that they would have the effect of direct untruth, and would weaken the foundations of public faith, we are not at liberty to use them. How far, it may be suggested, does not this render the whole teaching about them inapplicable to the country in which we are living, and to that virtue of truth which, like hope in Pandora's box, seems to many persons (truly or not) to have remained, when all else that was godly made wings to itself and flew away? It is worth a thought. However, even if we are, as other nations find us in diplomacy, and as we Catholics find our fellow-countrymen in Parliament and on juries, not altogether as truthful as could be wished, it is plain that we pretend to be truthful, and honour with our praise the virtue we dishonour by our practice; and this is enough to make real scruple about it especially desirable.

But of one thing I am quite clear, that many persons aiming at perfection, practising mental prayer, and performing bodily mortifications, come to a dead standstill because of their want of scruple about insincerities far short of untruth. Diplomacy of manner, way, and speech, circuitous routes for courtesy's sake, giving things the wrong names, and being silent when silence is really speech, these things are undoing men's sanctity, and causing saints to break in the mould, and frustrating beautiful purposes of grace every day; and so subtle is the delusion that, when men feel that something is wrong in them but cannot depict it, they wake up as it were to some rude savage theories of misplaced and inopportune fraternal correction, or think to compensate for their cowardly double-dealing and double-tonguedness, by the misplaced effusions of a vulgar candour. The devil will turn their attention in any direction rather than the right one. He dearly loves those little plausibilites and diplomacies. They are caverns where he finds congenial darkness, even when the rays of grace are beaming brightest on the soul, and where he lies hid till the splendours have faded into the usual grey twilight of a soul that is but half for God.

All around us is hollow and insincere. The world is so

in all ages: how eminently must it be so in a time of great luxury and high civilization! Simplicity is lacking in every department of life. As year glides away after year, it is the great truth which our experience is always teaching, and yet which is ever new to us, because the disappointment is ever raw, that even good people are less true, less frank, less honest, less manly, less noble than we took them to be. We go on trusting, only because it is so intensely miserable not to trust, that we would rather trust and be deceived, than not trust at all. It is the cry which age utters more and more piteously, as time goes on and the hair grows grey, that the beautifulness of truth is departed from among us. For it is a sort of consolation to believe that the time of youth was a golden age, and that the world has worsened since. Alas! the gilding that we miss was never there: it was only sunshine that we projected from ourselves.

It is hard to exaggerate the want of simplicity which is around us. No one is to his dearest friend what he really is. Let us take ourselves the man whom we most love and revere. How little does he know of us! How little do we let him know of us! How much we give him to understand which in reality is not true! We are acting a part before him. We are weighing our words, exaggerating our sympathies, balancing our judgments, toning our minds to his. We would not for the world he should know what we really are. There are whole parts of our character curtained off from his observation We see where his judgment of us is falsely favourable, but we have not the heart to set him right. We cannot trust the strength of his love in the face of our real vileness. Sometimes we hate ourselves for this very deceitfulness; it is so intolerable a thing to be loved for the very virtue, of whose opposite vice we are in fact the slaves.

If even friendship is thus conventionally, nay, inevitably and blamelessly insincere, what must the less sacred relations of society be? Take away from social intercourse false praise of others, and half conscious and half unconscious praise of self, and what is left behind? A hateful refuse of uncharitable judgments of others, and nothing more. In one word, wherever we look and on whatever point we bring our scrutiny to bear, all around us is lie, affectation, and pretence. Forced sympathies, unreal excitements, imaginary interests, hypocritical enthusiasms, fashionable likings and dislikings, contagious imitations, and a whole significant world of conventional conversation which has not the meaning the language grammatically only would convey - these are the component parts of daily well mannered intercourse. But how long will even the domestic virtues live and thrive in such an atmosphere? As to the Name of God, a rude blow would hardly be a coarser surprise than it would be, amid the nicely-adjusted and smoothly-fitting insincerities of the system. What wonder that year after year this greedy gnawing London, into whose den the young generations are thrown successively, should be eating the worth out of men and the very heart out of women?

But let us cast an eye at the action of simplicity in the spiritual life. Simplicity lives always in a composed consciousness of its own demerit and unworthiness. It is possessed with a constant sense of what the soul is in the sight of God. It knows that we are worth no more than we are worth in His sight; and while it never takes its eye off that view of self, so it does not in any way seek to hide it from others. In fact, it desires to be this, and no more than this, in the eyes of others; and it is pained when it is more. Every neighbour is, as it were, one of God's eyes, multiplying His presence; and simplicity acts as if

every one saw us, knew us, and judged us, as God does; and it has no wounded feeling that it is so.

Thus, almost without direct effort, the sphere of selflove is so narrowed that it has comparatively little room for action; although it never can be destroyed, nor its annoyance ever cease, except in the silence of the grave. The chains of human respect, which in the earlier stages of the spiritual life galled us so intolerably, now fall off from us, because simplicity has drawn us into the unclouded and unsetting light of the eye of God. There is no longer any hypocrisy. There is no good opinion to lose, because we know we deserve none, and doubt if we possess it. believe we are loved in spite of our faults, and respected because of the grace which is in us, and which is not our own and no praise to us. All diplomacy is gone; for there is no one to circumvent and nothing to appropriate. There is no odious laying ourselves out for edification; but an inevitable and scarcely conscious letting of our light shine before men, in such an obviously innocent and unintentional manner, that it is on that account they glorify our Father who is in heaven. Who would dare to talk of God as laying Himself out to display His own perfections in creation? Nay, He hides Himself; He has to be looked for and found out by all manner of deep thought, unexpected concealments, noiseless disclosures, and delightful surprises. The secrecy of the saints is akin to their simplicity. But this leads me almost at once to our next grace. So that I shall say no more now than that simplicity clothes us from head to foot in Christlike gracefulness. It gives an unworldly air to all we do, an astonishing persuasiveness to all we say. and our very silence and inaction have something so celestial about them, that they exorcize evil and convert souls.-"The Blessed Sacrament," 212-218.

CXCIV

SINCERITY WITH GOD

SIMPLICITY requires that we should be truthful with God. It is almost startling to speak of such a thing, because of the horror of supposing an opposite line of conduct possible. Yet, alas! it is not only possible, but common. We know how God sees through and through us. We know how bare and odiously intelligible to Him are all the subterfuges of our deceit and misery. We know how His eye rests upon us incessantly, and takes us all in, and searches us out, and as it were burns us with His holy gaze. His perfections environ us with the most awful nearness, flooding us with insupportable light. To His eye there is not only no concealment, there is not even a softening shade, or a distance to subdue the harshness and veil the unworthiness. Yet, for all this, to be straightforward with God is neither an easy nor a common grace. Oh, with what unutterable faith must we believe in our own falsehood, when we can feel it to be anything like a shelter in the presence of the all-seeing God!

We take liberties with Him, for want of a holy fear. In unprepared petitions, in slovenly sacraments, in cursory self-examinations, in distracted meditations, in outward posture, in inward recollection, in the way in which we postpone Him to other things, we make free with His immense majesty. We try to hide from Him our want of filial confidence. We know how stupid the attempt is. We are well aware that we cannot hide from Him; but we keep our knowledge within us, and will not let it come up to the surface in the shape of practice. We are determined not to realise His terrific greatness, His overwhelming sanctity, or His tingling nearness: and so, in numerous little

deceitful ways, we do not treat Him as the God in whom our understanding believes. It is a shocking thought, to be unreal with God; yet we all of us are so to a most frightening extent. God help us! We are living in a world of the most bewildering and complicated untruthfulness: but it is to be our eternal joy to stand revealed in the blaze of unutterable Truth, and revel in our want of concealment for ever!—"Spiritual Conferences," 154, 155.

CXCV

PATIENCE WITH OTHERS

WE may say that, partly from our own badness and partly from theirs, all mankind, far and near, kindred and strangers, are a trial to our patience in some way or other. If those who are above us exercise our patience, our natural inclination is immediately to revolt, and we are quite as much kept in subordination by human respect, by fear and the consequence to our own interests, as by the real grace of patience. Even when we obey, we take the bloom off our obedience by a sulky manner, or by a sullen word, or a downcast look, or a complaint to others, or a general reproachful sadness of demeanour by which we manage to make superiors unhappy and disquieted, and to show them what an exercise of authority they are putting forward when they constrain us to what we do not like. The sanctifying power of half our life is lost by this single ungracefulness. If the trial of our patience comes from those below us, we sometimes proudly exhibit our sense of their inferiority. We crush them by a reprimand, or wither them by a look, or sting them with coldness. If the trial comes from our equals, how often do we offend by rudeness,

abruptness, unkindliness, and a want of mutual respect! When we are engaged with others in any kind of work, or are constantly in society with others, our patience is often exercised. We encounter stupid, passionate, or importunate people; and we do not look at each of these meetings as a gift from God, who is going to watch how we behave, and visit us accordingly. Almost every circumstance in life has a manner, time, place, and degree, by which it tries our patience; and it is not too much to say, especially in the earlier stages of the devout life, that this exercise does more for us than fast or discipline; and that when we can go through with it for love of the sweetness of Jesus, we are not far from interior holiness.

The blessings which result from this practice in the interior life are manifold. The English spirit of always standing up for our rights is fatal to perfection. It is the opposite of that charity of which the Apostle says, that it seeks not its own. Now this spirit is admirably mortified by the exercise of patience. It involves also a continual practice of the presence of God; for we may be called upon at any moment for an almost heroic display of good temper. It is a short road to unselfishness; for nothing is left to self. All that seems to belong most intimately to self, to be self's private property, such as time, home, and rest, are invaded by these continual trials of patience. Family life is full of such opportunities, and the sanctity of marriage abounds with them. It may be added, for it is no slight thing, that there is not a spiritual exercise less open to delusions than is this, though the subtle, disheartening Guilloré fills three whole chapters with them.

In truth there are certain admonitions which are necessary concerning this exercise of patience with others. It is a practice which requires a long apprenticeship, so that it is in itself an exercise of patience. To be impatient because they are not patient is no uncommon exhibition in spiritual persons. Progress in the acquirement of this virtue is not easily perceived, as in the substantial self-denial there is often much inward trouble and heat. Hence we must take comfort and go on making efforts. It is a matter in which every effort is in reality an advance. There are also particular times when we must be very cautious not to be irritable and impatient. After long prayer, great sweetness in meditation, or an unusually fervent Communion, or indeed any spiritual effort, we are extremely liable to lose our temper, partly through a law of our physical constitution, and partly because the devil wants to repair the losses we have just made him suffer. We must be content, therefore, at first with material patience, irritable patience. We must not be vexed or cast down about it. Something better will come of it presently. It is well to accuse ourselves of the slightest fault against patience at confession, to make frequent acts of contrition about it during the day, and to cast many a loving look at our Crucifix, that touching emblem of the patience of God. Strange to say, notwithstanding God is impassible, there is something peculiarly Godlike in the virtue of patience. If it is true of any one grace, besides charity, it is true of patience, that it is the beauty of holiness. - "Growth in Holiness," 113-115

CXCVI

PATIENCE WITH SELF

But if it is a hard thing to be patient with others, how much harder is it to be patient with ourselves! Indeed, so much is this branch of the virtue neglected, that we seen almost to think its opposite a merit, as if impatience with self were a heroism of a meritorious mortification. There is a vast difference between hatred of self and impatience with self. The more of the first we have the better, and the less of the last. Once let us surmount the difficulty of being patient with ourselves, and the road to perfection lies clear and unobstructed before us.

But what do we mean by impatience with self? Fretting under temptations, and mistaking their real nature, and their real value also :- In actual sin being more vexed at the lowering of our own self-esteem than being grieved at God's dishonour:—In being surprised and irritated at our own want of self-control because of our subjection to unworthy habits: -Being depressed because we experience lively movements of anger or give way to fits of sadness, even where, as is possible, there is no sin, either in the one or the other: -Being annoyed with our own want of sensible devotion, as if it was at all in our own power, and as if patience in dryness was not just the very way to earn sweetness and spiritual consolation: -Being disquieted because we do not find the remedies we have applied to our faults act as we expected, forgetting that they need time, and that we often put secret obstacles in the way. To these symptoms we may add a sort of querulousness about the want of spiritual progress, as if we were to be saints in a month.

All these dangerous symptoms of impatience with self come from one or other of four causes, and it is there we must seek them, and kill them in the nest, before they are able to fly. Verily they are birds of prey to our spiritual life. The first cause is self-love, which is unable to brook the disappointment of not seeing ourselves in times of trial come out beautiful, erect, and admirable. The second is want of humility, which causes us not to appreciate our own

real meanness, or to comprehend the incapacitating effects of our past sins. The third is the absence of a true estimate of the huge difficulties of the spiritual life, and therefore of the necessity of an utter divorce with the world and a formal abjuration of its maxims, before we can really give ourselves to God. The fourth is an obstinate disinclination to walk by faith. We fret under it. We want, nature wants, self-love wants, everything in short, except faith itself, wants, -to see, to know, to be sure, to reason, to ascertain that success is inevitable.

To be patient with self is an almost incalculable blessing, and the shortest road to improvement, as well as the quickest means by which an interior spirit can be formed within us, short of that immediate touch of God which makes some souls interior all at once. It breeds considerateness and softness of manner towards others. It disinclines us to censoriousness, because of the abiding sense of our own imperfections. It quickens our perception of utterest dependence on God and grace, and produces at the same time evenness of temper and equality of spirits, because it is at once an effort, and yet a quiet sustained effort. It is a constant source of acts of the most genuine humility. In a word, by it we act upon self from without, as if we were not self, but self's master, or self's guardian angel. When this is done in the exterior life as well as the interior, what remains in order to perfection?

There are various means by which we may cultivate this patience with ourselves. Frequent meditation on our own nothingness is a great help to it; and an especial dwelling upon any meanness and vileness and deceit of our past lives, the reconsideration of which can be attended with no danger, because of the intrinsic disgust and cutting shame which the details of such meanness awake within us. When we hear of some great crime, we may consider that we

might have done it ourselves, or perhaps worse, were it not for grace. We must be careful also at confession, and in preparing for it, not to mistake self-vexation for real contrition; and then we may persevere in asking for patience in a special way after Communion. We must tow-it is very hard, but time wins its way through hard things - to rejoice in all encounters which show us our need of grace, and the possibility of dreadful sins which we always carry about with us. Neither must we be in a hurry to forget past sins, and to force our way into the sunshine. If God gives us quite a depressing sense of sin, let us cherish it and stagger on beneath the burden. Blessed is any weight, however overwhelming, which God has been so good as fasten with His own hand upon our shoulders. In a word, patience with self is almost a condition of spiritual progress; and St. Catherine of Genoa is its patron saint. - "Growth in Holiness," 115-118.

CXCVII

PATIENCE WITH GOD

We have still to speak of patience with God. The very word sounds strange. Let it not breed familiar or irreverent thoughts. It is a very serious question, and must be approached with the profoundest respect, remembering of what an infinite majesty and unfathomable condescension it is, of which with all abasement we are venturing to speak. Again and again I have said, it is an awful thing to have dealings with Almighty God. His favours are our fears. Yet let us think of this with the intensest filial and confiding love. Would that we could always speak reverently of Him whom we do far more than either fear or love, whom we worship as our God!

God condescends to try our patience, who are dust and

ashes, in various ways; and some of them are peculiar, or belong chiefly, to the spiritual life. His ordinary providence, therefore, the ways of His justice, and the darkness of His dec ees, do not now concern us: His majesty is adorable, Els glory inscrutable in them all. In the spiritual life He vouchsafes to try our patience first of all by His slowness. Slowness is the grand characteristic of the Creator as seen by the side of His creatures. Were it not for His slowness, where should we have been long since? We forget this, when His slowness makes us impatient. He is slow: we are swift and precipitate. It is because we are but for a time, and He has been from eternity. Thus grace for the most part acts slowly, and mortification is as long a work as levelling a mountain, and prayer as the growth of an old oak. He works by little and by little, and sweetly and strongly He compasses His ends, but with a slowness which tries our faith, because it is so great a mystery. We must fasten upon this attribute of God in our growth in holiness. It must be at once our worship and our exemplar. There is something greatly overawing in the extreme slowness of God.

He tries us also by His hiddenness and by the impenetrable obscurity in which He shrouds almost all His supernatural processes, both in the sacraments and out of them. As the Bible says, He is a God who conceals Himself. If we could see Him, so we say, then cheerfully would we follow Him! Were we but sure it was He! But we cannot see Him. Often He could not show Himself to us, if He would. That is, His mercy could not, for the sight would slay us. Darkness is good for us when light would blind us. But look over the exercises, the trials, the temptations, and the vicissitudes of the spiritual life, and what a gain it seems as if it would be to us, could we only

Let it overshadow our souls, but let it not disquiet them.

see Him! It is not so. It is best as it is. The enigma is our life. We must be patient with it. Sometimes He condescends to look mutable and fickle. He lets the moon amid the driving clouds of night be His emblem. He entices us into a road, and then leaves us just where it branches into two. He shows his face and then He hides it. We see it for a moment, and it is gone before we have caught the expression of it. Or the light so pleased us, we did not look at the dark objects it was meant to enlighten. Why does He interweave His bright and dark with us so perpetually? Sometimes He puzzles us as to His will. He lets half words fall into our hearts. sends us what look like leadings, and are not so. He feigns, as our Lord did when He made as if He would pass the boat that stormy night on the water. He lets us think that He has contradicted Himself, He who is eternal truth, unchangeable simplicity. He looks as though He were entrapping us, getting us to commit ourselves to Him, and then reproaching us, and going away as if we had offended Him, or changing His mien, and throwing us into prison and making slaves of us, as if in contempt of our generosity, as if our best were an insult to Him, as it would be but for the infiniteness of His amazing compassion. One while He is the most indulgent of fathers, another while the least forbearing of masters: now the most patient of teachers, and again the sharpest of critics: here the most gracious of sovereigns, there the most exacting of despots: now almost a plaintiff to our human hearts, and again the most vindictive of persecutors. Look as Thou wilt, most gracious Lord! nothing of Thee will we believe but that Thou art an infinitely good God, in Thy wrath remembering mercy, and as unchangeably a Father as Thou art eternally a God !

His chastisements also try our patience. Not only

because they are never really light; for He never punishes in vain; but because they are unexpected, and seem inconsistent with what we have heard, and look disproportionate to such little failings. For if He caressed us when we greatly sinned, and forgave us even when we longed to be chastised, why for a trifling infidelity or an almost natural defect does the slow, heavy, regular lash endure so long? Does He forget we are creatures made of clay, and that if He does not mind, He will break us? Any chastisement which seems out of keeping with His usual dispensations tries our patience, and is specially hard to bear. In the matter of answers to prayer we are equally bewildered. If He does not answer, faith faints. If He does, the answer is like Himself, it is slow and obscure, and a riddle. Sometimes it is as if He answered in anger, and took us at our word in a strange way for a Father. At last He abandons us. At all events there would be no bewilderment here, were we not told that this is precisely the hour of His especial and sustaining grace. Strange! for it is like a mountain falling on our hearts. It wrung a cry even from the silence-loving Heart of our ever-blessed Saviour on the Cross.

Shall I say then, be patient with God? Better say, Let us worship as heretofore; for is He not still God?

There are various ways in which we offend against this sublime exercise of patience. The first is by petulance in prayer, bold words of complaint, as if God had injured us, or as if He liked them, and that it was for every one to dare to be with Him as Job was of old, and to pour out his heart in those bitter burning words, whereby God mysteriously acknowledged that he had justified himself. Or our impatience may show itself in an indiscreet and inordinate pursuit of virtue, a greediness for graces, and

a wounded vanity from venial imperfections. / It makes us capricious and fickle. We give up pray/r, because the answer lingers. We weary of sacraments because of their monotony. We shift our spiritual exercises because they have not wrought miracles. We abandon medicines because health has not followed instantaneously. All infidelity is impatience with God. Thus we mar our mortifications by it. We begin them on impulse; we practise them without sobriety; and we leave them off because we are grown tepid and do not like the pain. So in the same manner a good work suggests itself: we cast up to heaven one ejaculation, far more full of self-will than of pure zeal; and we begin the work forthwith without prayer or counsel or deliberation. What wonder we leave it half done? Is not the land round about us all full of these follies of impulse, impatience, and conceit, which we ourselves have set up amid the mute wonder of pitying angels? We give ourselves vocations, and then change them again. We confer missions on ourselves, tyrannize over ourselves by multiplying our responsibilities, and send ourselves on embassies to the very end of the earth. We can hardly relieve sorrow or allay distress, but there is some impatience in it. We pray God daily not to lead us into temptation; yet we are daily placing ourselves in dangerous occasions which we have reached almost out of breath, leaving Him far behind, who will not be hastened on His way.

But what are the remedies for this? We must study God. We must drink of the spirit of His ways. We must love God, ardently, intensely, to the death. But we must fear Him also, with a fear unutterable, abasing, perpetual. Fear must beat in our blood, and quiver in our limbs, and many a time tongue-tie us and throw us down. Oh, how we shall love God, when we fear Him thus!

Magnificer t fear! thou art a gift of the Holy Ghost! We must wait or God, long, meekly, in the wind and wet, in the thunder and the lightning, in the cold and the dark. Wait, and Le will come. He never comes to those who do not wait. He does not go their road. When He comes, go with Him, but go slowly, fall a little behind; when He quickens His pace, be sure of it, before you quicken yours. But when He slackens, slacken at once: and do not be slow only, but silent, very silent, for He is God.—"Growth in Holiness," 120-125.

CXCVIII

THE GIFTS OF GOD

THE highest use of God's gifts is to give them back to Him again. Nothing is in reality our own, except our sin. God is jealous of anything like a proprietary feeling, even in the gifts of nature; but in respect of the gifts of grace this jealousy is increased a thousandfold. We must make Him the depositary of His own gifts, because we do not know how to use them rightly. We must be like children who bid their father keep the little treasures which he himself has given. So with the gifts of God. They are more ours, when in His keeping, than in our own. Everything which increases our feeling of dependence upon Him is sweet, and safe, and true, and right, and the best thing. Besides which, God is the end for which all things were given. Nothing good is meant to stay with us. It would not keep good. It would spoil. Every creature is a channel through which things find their way back to God, as surely as blood finds its way back to the heart, through endless turnings. and has done its work, not in delaying anywhere, which would be disease, but in passing on, and in passing swiftly kindling and making alive as it went along. Moreover, our humility is always in peril, if we detain a gift of God, even if it were for no longer than to look it in the face, and love it, and then think of it with complacency when it is gone. We must refer everything to God. It is the secret of being holy. Grace comes, and temptations give way, and great things are done, and love is all in a jubilee, and then self begins to sing an undersong, but we are making such a noise with praising God that we do not hear, and she is wounded, and holds her tongue, and we know nothing of it. Could we not keep up that beautiful noise for ever? Oh yes! for graces are always coming; like the people in the streets, there is no end to them, sometimes a thinning, never a break. So we could be always praising God, always sending back to Him, when we have humbly kissed them, the gifts and graces He has sent us. Besides which, God and His gifts are two very different things. Sometimes He feigns as if He would over-reach us, in order to try our love. He sends us some very heavenly gift, and then watches to see if we will take it for Himself, and rest in it, not as if it were our own, yet not as if it were His, but as if it were Himself. But the soul that loves truly can never fall into this mistake. It no more thinks of lying down on one of God's best gifts to rest itself, than we should dream of lying on the green yielding billows of the sea to sleep. It must reach God, nothing short of God. It keeps giving back His gifts, as if in constant protest that, needful as they are, they are not Himself, and cannot stand in His stead.—"The Foot of the Cross," 97, 98.

CXCIX

UTOPIA

It has often been the benevolent amusement of sages and philanthropists to draw pictures of imaginary republics.

When we have fully pictured to ourselves this possible world, we might curiously descend into every conceivable ramification of that new planetary life, and see what the behaviour of these creatures would be like. We might UTOPIA 557

watch them in the arrangements of their social system, in the complications of their public life, or in the minute habits of their domestic privacy. We might picture to ourselves their trades and professions, their standards of the beautiful, their arts and sciences, their philosophy and literature, their rules of criticism, their measures of praise or blame. We might imagine war to be an impossibility of their nature, their political revolutions to be without sin, their sufferings not to be penalties of a past fault, or solitude to be to them the same sort of normal state which society is to us. When we had completed our picture, this possible world would have some kind of likeness to our own, although it would be so very different, partly because God would be its Creator, and partly because we could not paint the picture without copying in some degree from ourselves

This imaginary world would probably, however, differ less from ours, than ours would differ from itself, if the precept of the love of God were fully kept by all the inhabitants of the world. Let us try now to put a picture of this before ourselves. It need not be altogether imaginary, and it may actually help to realise itself. Every man and woman in the world, and every child as soon as it comes to the use of reason, is bound by the golden chains of that delightful precept. Christian or Jew, Mahometan or idolater, all souls in all their degrees of darkness and of light, are under the bright shadow of that universal commandment. Nothing can be more reasonable. Every creature was created by God for God's own sake. Hence he has nothing to do but God's work, nothing to seek but God's glory; and that work and that glory God has been pleased to repose in love, in the easy service of a rational and yet supernatural love. Neither has He left us in uncertainty with respect to the extent of the precept.

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength." St. Matthew tells us that a doctor of the law said to Jesus, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment." Where Moses says, "with thy whole strength," St. Matthew says, "with thy whole mind." Thus God is solemnly declared to be the object of our love, which love is to be distinguished by two characteristics. It is to be universal: heart, soul, mind, and strength are to go to it. It is to be undivided: for it claims the whole heart, the whole soul, the whole mind, the whole strength. . . .

Does the world keep it? Let us see what it would be like if it did keep it. We are to suppose that all the men, women, and children over seven throughout the earth loved God always, God supremely, and God with an undivided heart. The earth might then be called a world of undivided hearts. It would be the peculiarity of this planet, of this portion of God's creation, of this fair moon-lit garden third in order from the sun: it would be its peculiarity that it was a living world of loving human hearts, over which God reigned supreme with an empire of undivided love. This—we must use human words—is what God intended, what God expected, the paradise and court He had prepared for His Incarnate Son. And if it were so, would it be less unlike the real world than that imaginary possible world which we were picturing to ourselves just now?

If all classes in their places, and all minds in their measure and degree, were loving God according to the precept, wonderful results would follow. To realise them we should have to penetrate into every corner of the world,

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into every secret sanctuary of life, and watch the revolution which divine love would bring about. No one thing would be the same. The world would not be like a world of saints, because we are not supposing heroic, austere, self-sacrificing love, but only the love of the common precept. Voluntary suffering is part of the idea of the Incarnation, or flows from it: for Christian austerity is a form of love, which has little in common with the proud expiating penance of the Hindoo, except the look. It would not be like an immense monastery; for all men would be in the world, not leaving the world; and the world would be a means of loving God, not a hindrance which our courage must vanquish, or a snare from which our prudence is fain to fly. There would be no wickedness to make a hell on earth: yet earth could not be heaven, because there would be no vision of God. It would be more like purgatory than anything else. For the love of God would not hinder suffering, though it would almost abolish sorrow. But it would make all men pine very eagerly and very patiently to love God more, and to see Him whom they already love so much. The whole earth would be one scene of religion, not of religious enthusiasm or the romance of sanctity, but of active, practical, exclusive business-like religion. Common-sense would be engrossed with religious duties. Each man would be unimpassionately possessed with religion, as if it were his ruling passion, working powerfully under control. Yet all this would be within the bounds of the common precept, not like the sublime preternatural lives of the canonized saints. Remember-we are not speaking of what is possible, so much as of what is conceivable.

What a change would come over the political world! The love of God would be the honest and obvious and exclusive end of all states and nations. Diplomacy would fade away into mutual counsel for God's glory, and having

lost all its mystery, it would lose all its falsehood too. Commercial treaties, questions of boundaries, the rights of intervention-what a new character the love of God would infuse into as many of these things as it still allowed to live! The mercantile world, how calm and indifferent it would become! No one would make haste to be rich. Except food and raiment and ordinary comforts, we say comforts because, on the hypothesis, men would not be saints, all else of life would be prayer and praise and works of mercy, with confession perhaps for venial sins. The literature of these men would give forth nothing but what was chaste and true, ennobling and full of faith. A daily newspaper, such as we are acquainted with, would be a blissful impossibility. We fear that antiquarian questions might be pursued with somewhat less of zest than now, and possibly fewer sacrifices of life be made to advance the interests of science. A most vigorous reality would enter into and animate everything. Many professions would change their characters: many more would cease to exist. Systems of education would be greatly modified; and prisons and police would disappear from the land. Sessions of Parliament would be very short, and little would be said, and very much be done. The tone of conversation would be changed, and a sort of strange tranquillity would come over the race of men, with which energy would not be necessarily incompatible, but under which our energy would be so different from what it is now, that we cannot at all adequately represent it to ourselves.

But in return for this apparent dulness, which might affect some of the things on which our activity at present fastens by morbid predilection, the world would gain much in other ways. How magnificent would be the controversies of such a world! The peace and light of the love of God would elevate the intellect a thousandfold. The products

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of the human mind would be incalculably more profound and beautiful than now, and the amount of intellectual activity would be immeasurably increased, while a larger proportion of it also would be employed on the higher branches of mental philosophy. What elevation too, and gigantic progress, would the physical sciences probably receive, as well from the greater cultivation of mental philosophy, as from the reach and grasp of intelligence which more abundant grace would restore to us! Who can believe we should not know much more of nature, and of its mysterious properties, if we knew more of Him who originated them all? And love would teach us more of Him. The sciences of beauty too, how much more beautiful and abundant would they become, when they were called to minister to the sanctuary of God, and not to the mere material indulgences of men! The amount of private happiness would be likewise augmented beyond all calculation. All other loves would be as it were glorified by the love of God, and would be poured out of each human heart with an intensity and an abundance to which sin is now a complete impediment. The moral perfections of our nature would bring forth exquisite and generous fruits, of which we have at present but rare instances at distant intervals But above and beyond all this, there would be a world of supernatural actions, flowing in incessant streams from every heart, uniting us to God, purifying our commonest intentions, and transforming us day by day into an excellence far beyond ourselves. What must the precept be whose common observance would do so much as this? And yet this precept actually lies upon each one of us at this moment with the most inevitable universality and the most stringent obligation! Surely we must see to this.—"The Creator and the Creature," 168-170, 171-175.

CC

REST IN GOD

Sometimes, in a beautiful climate, we come upon a scene which, by its surpassing beauty, so satisfies mind, heart, and senses, that we sit entranced, taking it in without understanding it, and resting in the simple enjoyment of the sight. Thus for awhile a man may sit amid the folds of Etna, beneath a shady tree, on the marvellous mountainshelf of Taormina, and look out upon the scene. Everything that wood and water, rock and mountain, dazzling sky and translucent air can do, with the grand spirit of old history brooding over all, is there. It cannot be analysed or explained. We are taken in the nets of a beauty which masters us; and the sheer thought of it is a joy without thought for hours. This is a poor way of typifying the rest which is in the glorious, overshadowing thought of God. It is a self-sufficing rest, not only because He is almighty, all-holy and all-wise, nor because He is our own near and fatherly God, but simply and sheerly because He is God. Words will make it no clearer. God gives it to us sometimes and we know it; and seen through it, brighter than Sicilian air, more limpid than Arethusa's fountain, our struggle and fatigue look fair and delectable in that heavenly medium. But, in whatever measure God visits us with this sort of light, true it is that such is the normal state of our spiritual life,-struggle and fatigue, and not only after these but also during these, there remaineth a sabbath for the people of God: for they rest in the languors of love here, till their rest deepens into His eternal bosom hereafter.—"Growth in Holiness," 105, 106.

BOOK IV

THE THOUGHT OF THE ETERNAL YEARS



CCI

OUR DESTINY

It is one of the thoughts, beneath whose broad shadow all the nations of the earth may gather and sit musing, that, while the sun is shining, or the moon silvering the woods, or the noontide being lulled to sleep by its own fragrances, or the river lapsing down to the sea through tuneful groves and over cattle-spotted plains, this wonderful divine life is going on everywhere, close to us and far-off, in our own country and in other lands, far above the empyrean heaven and down in our own souls. It is a thought to make us very grave, that this life of God holds us like a hand, penetrates us like a sword, and knows nothing of the space which gives us room or of the time which is flowing above our heads. As it has been from all eternity, so is it now. It has found no new place. Creation has not in any way displaced it. It has undergone no modification. It has acquired nothing, experienced nothing. Its ungrowing magnificence is ever fresh as the dawn, ever new as the first creation. It is always the same, yet never monotonous. Illimitably outspread beyond all imaginary space, it is full, complete, intense, in every point of space, at every point of time. A paradise of intellectual delights, a boundless fire of uncreated loves, an ocean of glad, wise, resistless being,

it is glorious in its liberty and glorious in the grandeur of its necessities. It is a silence of amazing colloquies, a sanctuary of restful joys, a life of omnipotent and omnipresent simplicity, a unity of Three distinct adorable Persons. Surely all creation is not as a feather in comparison of this. How little, by the side of this awful majestic life, are all the schemes of men, how paltry their How tame and tiresome seem the political revolutions of earth, the greatest discoveries of science, the most golden epochs of literature, when we think of this omnipresent life of God! All human joys appear but like the bursting of the foam-bells on the crest of the wave, and all human sorrows but as the sighing of the night-wind in the distant wood; and yet this vast life of God compasses both the sorrows and the joys with tranquillest, watchfullest, minutest love. But to us they should seem even smaller than they seem to God, because the thought of the Infinite dwarfs all things in our sight, and ourselves also in our own estimation.

What a wonderful permission to us is the permission to love God! What then shall we say, when we consider that we ourselves are to be admitted to the sight and enjoyment of this life of God! It is the very end for which we were created. Nay more, we ourselves have been in some sense part of that divine life. We have been known and loved, up in those regions of eternity, in those boundless tracts of uncreated being, before the birth of time; and it is our very destination to enter into the joy of that exulting life, to see God as He is, and to live in endless companionship with Him. It is our incredible bliss to be allowed to add one spark more to the glory, the outward glory, of that blessed majesty. We can be one flash of lightning more round the immensity of His throne, one additional coruscation in the intolerable radiance of the mereiful crown which He vouch-

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safes to wear. Infinitely little as we are, we are, and it is our joy of joys to be so, a fresh exercise to Him of His irresponsible sovereignty. We are large enough to catch the light of His justice, and be another place for it to shine upon. His mercy can beautifully reflect itself even in the shallows of our tiny souls. We can lie upon the shore of that exulting life, and shine and glow and murmur while its bright waters wash over us for ever. Oh, beautiful destiny of men! how happy is our present, our future how much happier! How happy is our worship, how happy even the very fear with which we work out a salvation so magnificent and so divine!—"Bethlehem," 16-18.

CCH

DEATH

DEATH is an unsurveyed land, an unarranged science. There are continual new discoveries being hourly made in it by all men in person. All human actions are wonderful things. Each of them seems to contain depths of miracle. As conscience is the best inward evidence of God, so human actions are the best outward evidences of Him. But this last human act, which closes all series of human actions, this act of dving, is the most fertile in wonders. interest is intense from whatever point of view we look at it, and we may be sure that no man, until he has died himself, at all appreciates the marvellousness of death. Perhaps, as I have said, no two deaths are quite alike; and the most delicate shades of difference between one death and another would probably disclose to us more of the ways of God and more of the capabilities of the soul, than philosophy has ever taught. But we never see death from the other side. from the eternal side; and therefore we cannot do justice

to it. It is not a mere date; it is not simply the end of life. It is the confluence of time and eternity, the transition of grace into glory. It is a divine punishment made now into a most hidden operation of grace. Each separate death is an undisclosed secret between the Creator and the creature. So that, while we are studying death, it teases us to feel that we have to confine ourselves to what is general, while the real wonder of death is, more than is the case with most mysteries, in the details and the particulars. All we know is, that justice and mercy seem to come to us separately in life; whereas in death their operations are combined, and they are only one. Death belongs as much to the eternity which it begins, as to the life which it ends. Perhaps more.

—"Spiritual Conferences," 75, 76.

CCHI

AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH

Who does not know that the hour of death is an hour of revelations? We are already acquainted with the phenomena of the growing sensitiveness of conscience. We know how we come to see sin, where we saw none before, and what a feeling of insecurity about the past that new vision has often given us. Yet death is a sudden stride into the light. Even in our general confessions the past was discernible in a kind of soft twilight: now it will be dragged out into unsheltered splendour. The dawn of the judgment, mere dawn though it be, is brighter than any terrestrial noon; and it is a light which magnifies more than any human microscope. There lie fifty crowded years, or more. Oh, such an interminable-seeming waste of life, with actions piled on actions, and all swarming with minutest incredible

life, and an element of eternity in every nameless moving point of that teeming wilderness! How colossal will appear the sins we know of, so gigantic now that we hardly know them again! How big our little sins! How full of malice our faults that seemed but half-sins, if they were sins at all! Then again, the forgotten sins, who can count them? Who believed they were half so many, or half so serious? The unsuspected sins, and the sinfulness of our ignorances, and the deliberateness of our indeliberations, and the rebellions of our self-will, and the culpable recklessness of our precipitations, and the locust-swarms of our thought-peopled solitudes, and the incessant persevering cataracts of our poisoned tongues, and the inconceivable arithmetic of our multiplied omissions, -and a great solid neglected grace lying by the side of each one of these things,--and each one of them as distinct, and quiet, and quietly compassed, and separately contemplated, and overpoweringly light-girdled, in the mind of God, as if each were the grand sole truth of His self-sufficing unity! Who will dare to think that such a past will not be a terrific pain, a light from which there is no terrified escape? Or who will dare to say that his past will not look such to him, when he lies down to die? Surely it would be death itself to our entrapped and amazed souls, if we did not see the waters of the great flood rising far off, and sweeping onward with noiseless, but resistless inundation, the billows of that Red Sea of our salvation, which takes away the sins of the world, and under which all those Egyptians of our own creation, those masters whom we ourselves appointed over us, with their living hosts, their men, their horses, their chariots, and their incalculable baggage, will look, in the morning-light of eternity, but a valley of sunlit waters .-"Spiritual Conferences," 78-80.

CCIV

OUR SISTER, DEATH

THERE is a joy in death itself, which we cannot understand, because it is out of sight, an unexperienced joy. We know it from the dying. Perhaps there is some sweetness in the act of dying, heretofore unimagined, and coming to it from the fact that our Blessed Lord has died. Or perhaps it is a joy to us to find death all so much gentler than we had expected. Those last words of the great theologian, Suarez, always touch me deeply, when he looked up at the very last, and said, as if in some gratified surprise, "I never thought it was so sweet to die!" We think of those twenty-one closely-printed, double-columned folios, diffusive, exuberant, and full of unction, filled to overflowing with deep, and calm, and wise, and many-sided thoughts of God and of the things of God. But one thought was not there, that should have been, one of deepest significance to men to know, and yet he had not attained thereto, one thought, unthought then, but of deeper significance than thousands of his others which we could ill spare, the one which was to be his last thought, and the crown of all his thoughts, his mind as he took the first step into eternity, - "I never thought it was so sweet to die!"

The poets, then, were not so far wrong in their images of death. The summer sun shining on those motionless green billows of the grassy graveyard, the fragrance of the lime-flowers tranquilly depending in the windless air, the undersong of the bees in the blossoms, the quiet sky overhead so blue, and the spire pointing its untired finger up to the throne of God, so softly curtained in the infinity of that yielding blue! These outward images were not without their inward truth for those who die their deaths well, by

dying them in Christ. Deaths are being died somewhere every moment. But it is not a melancholy thought. Every hour—we feel it most at evening—it is like balm to our spirits to think of the busy benevolence of death, ending so much pain, crowning so much virtue, swallowing up so much misery, pacifying so much strife, illuminating so much darkness, letting so many exiles into their eternal home and to the land of their Eternal Father! Oh, grave and pleasant cheer of death! How it softens our hearts, and without pain kills the spirit of the world within our hearts! It draws us towards God, filling us with strength, and banishing our fears, and sanctifying us by the pathos of its sweetness. When we are weary, and hemmed in by life, close and hot and crowded, when we are in strife, and selfdissatisfied, we have only to look out in our imagination over wood and hill, and sunny earth, and starlit mountains, and the broad seas whose blue waters are jewelled with bright islands, and rest ourselves on the sweet thought of the diligent, ubiquitous benignity of death!-"Spiritual Conferences," 99, 100.

CCV

LIFE AND DEATH

LIFE, as no one can doubt, is more important than death. If death has a great influence on life, the influence of life on death is still greater. In fact the work of death can only be done safely in life. There are exceptions, to show how God can stretch His mercy, and also to magnify the efficacy of grace. But as the good life is worth nothing, so far as eternity is concerned, unless it is crowned by a good death, so a good death, though not impossible, is the exception where the life has not been good. Still, though

an exception, it is possible, and therefore from one point of view we may say that death looks more important than life. Nevertheless it may only be a seeming; for who knows whether some good thing among much evil, something striven for and clung to, even where there appeared no signs of strife, may not be the secret cause of those prodigious interventions of grace, which occur sometimes in the deaths of sinners? Perhaps also such interventions have never happened to those who presumed upon them beforehand, and deliberately delayed turning to God through a profane confidence in the graces and opportunities of death. But the practical truth is that which teaches us at once the most sober and solemn view of life, that every single thing we do is actually making death either harder or easier.

Death, therefore, is not an isolated action. Time and eternity are riveted in it. Life is not secured without it. Eternity is ratified by it. This is obvious; for death is at once a part both of life and immortality. Yet men often speak as if preparation for death were a distinct spiritual exercise, and nothing more than that. They know of course that all life is a necessary preparation for death, but they do not realise it. They answer rightly when they are questioned, but the truth does not always rest clearly in their minds. Whether we think of death, or whether we forget it, whether we serve God, or neglect Him, life, in spite of us, is all the while a minute and detailed preparation for death. . . .

All holy deaths come out of the death of Christ. If He had not died, how should we dare to die? He is the Creator. He invented the punishment of death. He also must suffer it. It was His own law of love. He has enlarged the gates of death, and hung lamps over them. It is strange how the elder saints dared to die. No wonder they speak of it so awfully, as if it led into such terrible dark-

ness, and looked like an end of all things, almost like an extinguishing of immortality. Great was their faith, these old patriarchs, kings, and prophets. But how different is death to us! Christ has died. A new creation were surely a less change. As death was the peculiar punishment invented by God for sin, so was the death of our Lord, precisely His death and nothing else, the peculiar price exacted by the Father for the redemption of the world. Thus, the death of Jesus is the life of every one of us. We live because He died. How marked a feature, then, in all our prayer, must be thanksgiving for the death of Christ? It must be, if such a thing could be, the universal special devotion of all Christians. Moreover, it was by His death that we succeeded to His Mother as our inheritance. Thus, the death of Jesus is entwined with our deaths. Thanksgiving for His death is the best prayer for our own. As the Father fixed precisely on His death as the price of our salvation, so must our devotion fix precisely on His death as the object of our love and praise.

Men's faces looking into a sunset are golden; so are our lives when they look always into the countenance of coming death.—"Spiritual Conferences," 101, 102, 119, 120.

CCVI

THE DESIRE OF DEATH

The desire which is part of holiness must be rather a desire of God, than a desire of death. World-weariness is a blessed thing in its way, but it falls short of being a grace. To be weary of the world is very far from being detached from it. I am not sure that there is not a weariness of the world, which is itself a form of worldliness.

World-wearied men often think and speak of death in a poetical, voluptuous way, which is most ungodly. They talk as if the turf of the churchyard were a bed of down, as if the grassy ridge were a pillow on which to lay our tired heads and slumber, and as if the grave were a cradle in which we should be rocked to sleep as the earth swayed, and so voyage unconsciously through space, like a sleeping child in a ship at sea. None but atheists could speak thus of death, if those who so speak really weighed their words. Such men habitually regard death as an end, and not as a beginning. It has been observed of intellectual men, that such talking of death is often a symptom of incipient mental aberration. It is certainly true that happy men more often desire death than unhappy men, and desire it more strongly, and that their desire is more truthful and more holy. An unhappy man desires death rather than God. He desires it with a kind of heathen despondency. He quotes the Odyssey and the Æneid. The pathetic imagery of those poems is more congenial to him than the straightforward realities of Christian theology. He fixes his eye morbidly on death; but he is anxious it should not look over death and beyond it. Whereas a happy, light-hearted, sunny-spirited Christian man, who has no quarrel with life, except its possibilities of sinning, somehow feels its burden more than the unhappy man, who clings to life with a sort of morose, sulky enjoyment. Yet, while the happy man feels its burden, his happiness inclines him to be eager for beginnings rather than to be impatient for conclusions. Thus, death is to him less the end of life, than the beginning of eternity. He desires God rather than death: for it is the gift of a joyous heart to find short ways to God from the most unlikely places.—"Spiritual Conferences." 124, 125.

CCVII

THE DEATH OF DEATHS

WE see but two things on Calvary, Jesus and Mary; and from each we learn a lesson, one about our own deaths, and one about the deaths of others. Jesus vouchsafes to teach us how to die. If He in His great hour would have His Mother by Him, how shall we dare to die without her? In all things must we imitate Jesus, although it be in a sphere so infinitely below Him. But most of all, it is of importance to us to imitate Him in His death. If it had been well, He would have loved to spare her that terrific scene, though she perhaps would have accounted her absence a cruel mercy. It was there, at that deathbed, that she became our Mother. There is surely not one of us into whose mouth faith does not many times a day put that universal prayer, the prayer of the pope and the peasant, of the doctor and the scholar, of the rich and the poor, of the religious and the secular, that the Mother of God may assist us in the hour of death. But we must imbed this petition into all our pravers. Let us leave to God, without dictation or even wish, the time, and place, and manner, of our death, so only that it be not an unprovided death, and above all things not unprovided with Mary. The hour of death is a thirsty time, and exhausts great graces. Unsuspected chasms open suddenly in the soul, and swallow up past years, old habits, and a thousand other things we can ill spare then. The devil reserves his worst weapons for the last. It is very terrible not to be able to die twice, lest the novelty get the better of us the first time, -and it is a tremendous stake. There are great sacraments for that hour, but not greater than are needed. Watch a dying man! See how absolutions sink swiftly into his dry soul, like summer rain into the gaping

ground. And yet the battle is still coming and going in his eyes. Let us have Mary. Whether she be there visibly or invisibly, whether she speak and work, or work without speaking, let it be an agreement of long standing, a pledge not to be broken, that she shall be present to conduct for us a ceremonial so difficult and yet of such unutterable import. It is worth while to spend a whole life in asking this, if only we gain the object of our petition at the last. What is a good life worth if it be not crowned by a good death? Yet a good life is the nearest approach in our power to a good death. There have perhaps been comparatively few good deaths, which have not come at the end of good lives. And those few, so all the believing world says, have been contrived by Mary. But a good life is the likeliest of all things to bring her to our bedsides in that hour. A cross-bearing life is for ever meeting Mary. At crucifixions she is present as it were officially. If Jesus would not die without her, she will love us all the more if we refuse to do so either. However long the agony has been, however troubled in spirit the poor passing soul, blessed above all the dead are those, whose eyes Mary herself has closed!

Such is the lesson which Jesus teaches us about our own deaths. We learn one from Mary about the deaths of others. It is, that devotion for those in their last agony is a Marylike devotion, and most acceptable to her Immaculate Heart. There is not a moment of day or night in which that dread pomp of dying is not going on. There are persons, like ourselves, or better than ourselves, and whose friends have with reason loved them more than ever ours have loved us, who are now straitened in their agony, and whose eternal sight of God is trembling anxiously in the balance. Can any appeal to our charity be more piteously eloquent than this? When we think of all that Mary has done for each of those souls, those who ceaselessly, momentarily, are fixing their

eternity in death, when we call to mind the long train of graces which she has brought to every one of them, and consequently the yearning of her maternal heart for their final perseverance and everlasting salvation, we may form some idea of the gratefulness of this devotion to her. The deathbed is one of her peculiar spheres. She seems to exercise quite a particular jurisdiction over it. It is there that she so visibly co-operates with Jesus in the redemption of mankind. But she seeks for us to co-operate with her also. She would fain draw our hearts with hers, our prayers to hers. Is she not the one Mother of us all? Are not the dying our brothers and our sisters in the sweet motherhood of Mary? The family is concerned. We must not coldly absent ourselves. We must assist in spirit at every death that is died the whole world over, deaths of heretics and heathens, as well as Christians. For they too are our brothers and sisters; they have souls; they have eternities at stake; Mary has an interest in them. And their eternity is in more than double danger. How much more must they need prayers, who have no sacraments? How much darker must their closing scene be, where the full light of faith shines not? How much more earnest must be the prayers, when, not ordinary grace, but a miracle of grace, must be impetrated for them? Alas! they will have none of our other gifts; at least, and affectionately in their own despite, they shall have our prayers. We must remember also that we too have to die. We shall one day lie in the same strait, and need unspeakably the same charitable prayers. The measure which we mete to others shall be measured to us again. This is the divine rule of retribution. Nothing will prepare a smoother deathbed for ourselves, than a lifelong daily devotion to those who are daily dying. Mary assisted her Son to die in many mysterious ways. By His will, and in the satisfaction of her own maternal love,

she has now assisted at the deathbeds of many millions. She has great experience by this time, if we might so speak, and is wonderfully skilled in the science of the last hour. By prayerful thoughts, by pious practices, by frequent ejaculations, by the usages the Church has indulgenced, let us win a bright and gentle end for ourselves, by following Mary everywhere to the deathbeds she attends.

Such are the lessons we learn from the fifth dolour. The Crucifixion can never be rightly understood without Mary, because without her it is not truthfully represented. What a picture it is, the High Mass of the world's redemption, offered by Jesus to the Eternal Father, while the countless angels are the audience and the spectators! When the Host is elevated, the whole frame of inanimate nature trembles with terror and adoration, and earth darkens itself, which is to be a rubric it is to observe in the presence of Jesus for all ages. But what is Mary's part? Her Immaculate Heart is the living Altar-stone on which the Sacrifice is offered; it is the Server, the beatings of whose broken heart are the responses of the liturgy; it is the Thurible, in which the world's faith, the world's hope, the world's love, the world's worship, are being burnt like incense before the slain Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world; and finally the same Immaculate Heart is the Choir, the more than angelic Choir of that tremendous Mass; for did not the silence of her beautiful sufferings sing unutterable, voiceless songs into the ravished ear of the Bleeding Host? -" The Foot of the Cross," 289-292.

CCVIII

AFTER DEATH

Beneath the earth is that strange, almost unimaginable Church of the suffering souls, a work of divine art, a creation of love which is never at fault for means to secure its ends, yet not supplementary, as nothing in creation is, but part of the great merciful design for the discipline and success of man. Over that strange life of fiery suffering and of assured love, blended in equal and equable intensities, are cast the spells of the Sacred Humanity. Nowhere is gloom so soft, nowhere are shadows so beautiful, as in the land of purgatory. There are few of the redeemed to whom the geography of that valley of expectation must not one day become familiar. But it is through the Sacred Humanity that we enter there. Jesus is our judge as Man, not as the Word; and it is at His bidding, almost anticipated by our own love of perfect purity, that we enter there. His sentence is the gateway by which we gain access to those fires of the predestinate, a happy gateway to a land of pain, because implying a sentence of immortal happiness.

We shall have seen the Sacred Humanity before we enter there. A momentary intellectual vision of it will have passed before us, momentary, yet so engraven on our souls that we can never forget it, even if our pathway of fire lies before us in perspective for centuries of earth's slow time. It is in our Blessed Lord's Sacred Humanity, as the Head of creation, that the communion of saints is consummated; and it is by that communion that any help can find its road to our souls while they are imprisoned there, the captives of patiently impatient hope. It is by the satisfactions which He made in His Human Nature, that all those holy souls are gradually relieved and finally released: for even

our own satisfactions would have been no satisfactions if His had not gone before. It is His Human Blood, freshly outpoured in the daily Mass, which quenches the bitter flames. It is the second vision of His Sacred Humanity, for which every soul in all that soft and soundless realm of tranguil martyrdom is craving at this very hour. Purgatory is a province of our Lord's Kingdom which seems privileged to stand in peculiarly close relations to His Humanity.

Even in hell that gentle Humanity is active and energetic. Hell itself is but the consequence of the rejection of the Incarnation. There are none there but those who with assiduous perversity have placed themselves there. There are none there whose going there it was not the intention and the wish of the Sacred Humanity to hinder. There are none there, who had not with unprofitable valour to gain a miserable conquest over Jesus in order to get there. His mere Name receives there endlessly a kind of horrified worship, the unwelcome tribute of a terror that is not beautified by hope. Lucifer became the mean king of hell, a baffled inglorious tyrant, because he would not keep his glorious throne in heaven as a vassal king to the Babe of Bethlehem. It was as Man that Jesus, over whose shadow the miserable angel had stumbled in heaven, conquered hell's king on earth, and disjointed the compactness of his kingdom beneath the earth. All the clocks, that strike the hours on earth, mark some new victory of the Sacred Humanity over the rebel spirit. Each grace given is a blow struck. Each sacrament administered is a fortress taken. Each mercy granted is a gain for heaven. Each intervention of deathbed absolution is actually a robbing hell of what seems by earthly justice to be its due. Nav, down in the pit itself the Sacred Humanity is sensibly felt, like a throbbing heart, in the intolerable darkness. The skirts of His love trail over the fires, while the outcasts curse it as it passes. All the sufferings there, faithfully, eloquently, as in their immeasurable intensity they express the grandeur of the divine justice, are less terrible than they ought to be, because of the merits of that super-angelic Human Nature. For that Nature, ubiquitous in its benignant power, permitted master as it were of the resources of the Divinity, lengthens the slanting beams of the divine compassion, and prolongs them under the green earth even till they silver somewhat of that outer darkness.—" Bethlehem," 292-294.

CCIX

SHALL I BE LOST OR SAVED ?

THE depth of summer silence is all around. Those tall chestnuts stand up, muffled down to the feet with their heavy mantles of dark foliage, of which not a leaf is stirring. There is no sound of water, no song of bird, no rustling of any creature in the grass. Those banks of white cloud have no perceptible movement. The silence has only been broken for a moment, when the clock struck from the hidden church in the elm-girdled field, and the sound was so softened and stifled with leaves that it seemed almost like some ery natural to the woodland. We do not close our eyes. Yet the quiet of the scene has carried us beyond itself. What are time and earth, beauty and peace to us? What is anything to us, if our sins be not forgiven? Is not that our one want? Does not all our happiness come of that one want being satisfied? The thought of its being unsatisfied is not to be endured. Time, so quiet and stationary as this summer noontide, makes us think of eternity, and gives us a shadowy idea of it. But the thought of eternity is not to be faced, if our sins be not forgiven. But an eternal ruin-is that a possible thing? Possible! yes,

inevitable, if our sins be not forgiven. The loss of another's soul is a hideous thing to contemplate. It broadens as we look at it, until our head gets confused, and God is obscured. It is a possibility we turn away from: what then can we do with the fact? We think of the sorrows and the joys of a soul, of the beautiful significance of its life, of its manifold loveliness and generosity, and of all the good that glittered like broken crystals amidst its evil. How many persons loved it! How many lives of others it sweetened and brightened! How attractive often in its good-humoured carelessness about its duty! God loved it: it was the idea of His love, an eternal idea. It came into the world with His love about it like a glory. It swam in the light of His love, as the world swims in radiance day and night. It has gone into darkness. It is a ruin, a wreck, a failure, an eternal misery. Sin! What is sin that it should do all this? Why was there any sin? Why is sin sin at all? We turn to the majesty of God to learn. Instinctively we lift up our eyes to that noonday sun, and it only blinds us. Sin is sin, because God is God. There is no getting any further in that direction. That soul, some soul, is lost. What we think cannot be put into words. But our own soul! That soul which is our self! Can we by any amount of violence think of it as lost? No! our own perdition is absolutely unthinkable. Hope disables us from thinking it. But we know that it is possible. We sometimes feel the possible verging into the probable. We know how it can be lost, and perceive actual dangers. We know how alone it can avoid being lost; and in that direction matters do not look satisfactory. But it must not be lost: it shall not be lost: it cannot be lost. The thought of such a thing is madness. See then the tremendous necessity of the Precious Blood. Those heartless chestnut trees! how they stand stooping over the uncut meadows, brooding in the sunshine, as if there were no problems in the world, no uneasiness in hearts! They make us angry. It is their very stillness which has driven us on these thoughts. It is their very beauty which makes the idea of eternal wretchedness somewhat more intolerable. Yet let us be just to them: they have also driven somewhat further into our souls the understanding of that unutterable necessity of the Precious Blood!—"The Precious Blood," 61-63.

CCX

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

IF our devotion be free and easy, unhampered and disencumbered, firm of tread and bold of eye, swift of speech and decided in petition, light in the choice of words and exuberant in the flow of thought, if it be not chiefly and essentially a devotion of fear, how little like is it to the devotion of the celestial spirits! Alas! it is the mischief of all mischiefs, this loss of holy fear! For this fear is a special gift of the Holy Ghost, to be sought for by prayer and penance, by tears and cries, by patience and by impatience, and by the very yearnings of an earnest and familiar love. It has always seemed to me to be very and unexpectedly beautiful, when in the special office of our holy Father, St. Philip Neri, knowing what manner of man he was and what peculiar spirit he was of, he says in the antiphon of the Magnificat, Come, my children, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord: for how else shall the Saint teach us divinest love ?

Let us pass in review before ourselves the ancient patriarchs, and their deep awe of God, how they trembled with holy fear when God was nigh, and looked upon all things as unspeakably hallowed, over which He had so much as

cast His shadow. Jacob, who was so familiar with Him that he wrestled with Him and would not let Him go till He had blessed him, stands eminent among the saints of God for the gift and grace of fear. The very ritual of the old synagogue was steeped in fear and reverence. David, the man after God's own heart, was ever praying for an increase of holy fear. Our Blessed Lord Himself, says the apostle, "in the days of His flesh was heard because He feared." Mary and the apostles were filled, as none others ever were, with the beauty, the tenderness, and the excess of this heavenly fear. Hundreds of dying saints, around whose flesh and souls still clung the fair white robe of their unforfeited baptismal whiteness, trembled in every limb as they pondered the possible judgments of Infinite Purity, beneath whose judicial eve they were about to stand. If they needed this degree of fear, what degree need we? Why do frustrate vocations so abound? Whence come the multitude of unfinished saints, that lie all round us like the broken models of a sculptor's studio? Whence so little perseverance in the devout life, and such wearying and untying even of the vows and promises whereby men have bound themselves to God? Whence but from the lack of fear! We criticise God's ways and works, and treat Him as if He were some artist who fell lawfully enough within the jurisdiction of our impertinence. We make light speeches about Him, which we could hardly make about the saints and go unblamed. Our very prayer, when we come to pray, shows more than aught else our lamentable want of fear; for what is it too often, when the pressure of sharp sorrow does not wring from us a natural cry whose very truthfulness makes it reverent, -what is it, but want of preparation first of all, ungracefulness of posture next, then petulance in our petitions, and straightway thankless oblivion of the resolutions with which we closed ?

But how to mend all this? Much may be hinted in few words. Let us bring back again the old-fashioned respect for the very Name of God; for He has specially legislated for it in His commandments. Let us cultivate in ourselves a clear-sighted fear of His awful and uncertain judgments; and this will be specially done by discountenancing in ourselves any bold or trustful views of death, as if it were easy to die, or safe for us just now, or as if we had risen to any such heights as that we should dare to desire it for ourselves. We should ponder the last judgment, not as one of the terrors of the Lord which had its use in our conversion and is misplaced now, but as being infinitely terrible to us, even in the best mood and highest grace we have ever yet enjoyed.

We should avoid, as a pestilence of the soul, hasty wishes that we were in purgatory, or anything like a depreciation of the insufferable smart and keenness of its chastisements. If the omnipotence, justice, and purity of God have combined to create a special fire for the purposes of pure suffering and unmitigated pain, and have given to it an unexampled vindictive power even over disembodied souls, how dare we think of ourselves under the atrocity of its biting scourges with other than a terrified submission and a heroic running for refuge to all means, however hard, of making satisfaction to the justice of God? Yet we speak sometimes as if it would be quite an easy change, quite a welcome comfort, to pass from Mass and Benediction, from the sweet rosary and the copious fountain of indulgences, from the fatherly jurisdiction of Peter and the feasts and sodalities of Mary, from the little trouble and great harvest of earthly suffering, from the grand power of meriting and the oft-felt hand of Jesus on our heads in absolution, and to encounter instead the whip and scourge, the blister and the burn, the fiery wounds, and long, long punishments of purgatory. Did ever saint do this, but

Henry Suso once, and forthwith our Lord put off His gentleness, and rebuked him sharply for thus, not disdainfully, but somewhat lightly esteeming a rod which He had made?

Light views of sin, such as are rebuked in those deep words of inspired wisdom, "Be not without fear of a forgiven sin," and rash expressions of security of salvation, all are against the exercise of a holy fear. Even when we feel, and as it were cannot help but feel, an undoubting security of our salvation, it should be no boast or joy. It may be a symptom of something sadly amiss within; or at least something so unsafe for us and our attainments, that this very sense of security may be our most fatal insecurity of all. If we try to take humbler and more humbling views of all these things, and if with this we strive to do all our actions slowly, so as not to get into God's way, cross His path, or intercept Him, then by His mercy we shall be forming in ourselves most precious habits of holy and meritorious fear.—"The Blessed Sacrament," 258-261.

CCXI

THE LAST JUDGMENT

I NEVER see the Blessed Sacrament without being reminded of the last judgment of the world. Its very merciful stillness is a continual admonition to me of that resonant pomp and burning majesty. When I hold It in my hands, I can only feel that it is my Judge that I am holding: and this seems to quicken my love rather than restrain it; and Communion is the sweeter for being always in Viaticum. He comes at my Mass as He came at the Annunciation, from heaven, without passing through intermediate space, swifter than lightning, yet so tranquilly. I sink on my knees and worship, as Mary's ecstasy relaxed and she

genuflected to the new-born Babe. The stillness is so still that I hear therein the clear trumpets of the far-off doom. How different will be the sensible pomp of that magnificent advent! With what ceremonious care theology gathers it all from Scripture! A celestial fire will come forth from heaven, like a gorgeous tempest, as the precursor of the Judge, a type of the fiery spirit of Elias and the Baptist, which will involve the reprobate, and occupy the place where they are. They will wait there in the fire, the glorious, the jubilant, the vindictive fire.

Then will come forth the luminous Cross, the sign of the Son of Man in the heavens, beautiful and majestic, borne by angels as a standard, and visible as the rallying point of the brave saints all through the judgment. Next will follow the masses of clouds, to which Scripture so constantly alludes, and to which summer sunsets are the ravishing preludes, supernatural clouds which He lights up and beautifies by His effulgence. They throw His elect into an esctasy of joy and terrify the reprobate; for they look like a triumphal car, though He needs them not to lean upon. Meanwhile, clear as the voice of one we love, the wailing blasts of the archangelic trumpets go round the earth, and compass its uttermost ends, compelling the cold graves and the deep sea to give up their dead. His holy angels, all of them, without exception, will be there, not one left in heaven. They will assume lucid bodies, as theologians say, for all in that great pomp is to be sensible, as it was at the Ascension, on which mystery, as the angels themselves said, the second advent should be modelled. Heaven, deserted heaven, will have again the divine solitude which reigned there before Creation was.

Then, in His beauty and His majesty, in the old glory of His Ascension, the Judge Himself will come, with His Mother and His apostolic assessors. Who shall describe His coming? He is borne somehow, as Suarez says, by the choir of Thrones, those beings of overwhelming restful strength and loveliness, resplendent and inexplicable. Here we revert again to the Blessed Sacrament. For it was these very Thrones, as Boudon tells us, whom Surin saw always around the Host at Mass, those very Thrones, in whose society Angela of Foligno saw Jesus in the Eucharist, and their numbers, said she, were innumerable, thus, by their office connecting the present Sacrifice with the future Doom. His love has contrived to anticipate His Second Advent. He has found out a way of being with us, even when He is far from us. To what marvellous artifices has not His Human Nature helped Him. For it is by that nature that He is both Host and Judge. There is not one of us who will not see that pageant of the doom, and play a part therein. But where is He now, on whose beaming Countenance, and flashing Eye, and glowing clouds, and gleaming Thrones, all eyes of all men will be turned, all in wonder, some in ecstatic joy and rapturous love, some in scowling hate and crouching fear? Where is He now? Let us be still, and let the Mass go on. This is He, whom presently I must lift from the corporal, and in extreme fear make strangely free with Him, the Church constraining me, and the sweetness of His own command. He is the Judge. Oh, for the next genuflection, to throw into it a yet intenser act of faith and love !- "The Blessed Sacrament," 469-471.

CCXII

OUR MERCIFUL JUDGE

No one can meditate without very solemn apprehensions upon his final judgment. Yet it is the deliberate conviction

of our best thoughts and most mature reflection, that we had rather leave our final doom in the hands of the all-holy God than in those of the most merciful of sinful men. Our knowledge of God does not leave us room for a moment's hesitation. Strange to say! intimately as we know our own wretchedness, and appalled as we often are by the vision of our own sins, our sense of security in the hands of God rises in great measure from the fact that He knows us better than anyone else can know us. There are so many things by which God will not judge us, and by which men would judge us, that it seems as if our deliverance from these was already half a verdict in our favour. How often in life are we accused wrongly and mistakenly! How are motives imputed to us which we never had! We lose our temper for a moment, and are judged by that fact for years to come. When we do wrong, we often struggle manfully before we give way, but men put not these invisible struggles to our account. Full of want of simplicity as we are, and far from perfect truth, we are on the whole always more sincere than we seem. We frequently have good motives for imprudent and ill-looking actions. When we often appear careless and unkind, some secret sorrow is oppressing us, or anxiety disturbing us, or responsibility harassing us. Now God sees all this rightly, and man cannot. God does not judge us by any of these things; man must. Hence it is-a strange conclusion for sinners to come to—that God loves us better than men do because He knows us better.

He judges us by our inward religious acts, which necessarily go for nothing with men. He judges us by the fructifying of His own gifts within us, a very slight portion of which ever becomes visible to men, and even that portion only partially visible. Moreover, He judges us as He sees us in His Son. He judges us by the love which Mary, angels, and saints have for us. And finally, He judges us

with all our good ever collectively before Him, while our evil is interrupted by frequent absolutions, and our sins supernaturally effaced by the Precious Blood, so that by the laws of His own redeeming love He cannot see them in the same way that men see them. Thus, we are most reasonable in preferring rather to be judged by God than by men. The acutenesses of their criticism are far more to be dreaded than the niceties of His justice, when omnipotent love sits by as its assessor. Now, if we judge that the great majority of Catholics will not be saved, it is a human judgment; and like all human judgments it is more rigorous than the divine, because of the ignorance and the temper of the judge. Therefore we may modestly hope that God's judgment is otherwise, and that the great majority of Catholics are saved. It is only applying to the case of the multitude what we each of us find true in our own, that largeness and allowance in the Creator's judgment, which it is hopeless to look for at the tribunal of the creature.—" The Creator and the Creature," 344-346.

CCXIII

THE THOUGHT OF HELL

It is incredible how dear the glory of God becomes to those who are continually on the look-out for it. The very search gives them new senses whereby they can find it, while daily ncreasing love is perpetually sharpening their discernment. "The earth is full of Thy glory." What a joy to a leving heart! But it is not enough that heaven has overflowed, and that earth is filled with the blessed inundation of His glory. We would fain there should not be a nook of creation which is not full of it. Yet there is one place where

that glory seems frustrated, one place from which there rises neither plaint of prayer, nor joy of praise, nor blessing of thanks, nor aspiration of desire. It is the home of those who have had their trial and lost their cause, and with it have lost God for ever. Here is grace which has not borne fruit, or whose fruits have rotted upon the tree. Here are sacraments which have come to nought. The cross has been a failure, and God's loving purposes have been successfully resisted and direfully overthrown. Yet it is of faith that God's harvest of glory out of that unutterable gloom is immense; for the lost soul is as much an unwilling worship of His justice, as the converted soul is a willing worship of His love. Neither is Jesus without His own interests there: for the pains, unspeakable as they are, nay, even in the bare thought of them intolerable, are less than the merit of sin, less than the righteous measure of punishment, and are so because of Him. The Precious Blood, in some sense, has reached even there. Neither is that horrible place without a most blessed result on the salvation of many souls, through the holy and salutary fear which it breeds in them, and the loose and low notions of God which it corrects in the unthinking. . . .

Verily it is well, for our own sakes, to think sometimes of that horrid place. As truly as fair France lies across the Channel, as truly as the sun is shining on the white walls, and gay bridges, and bright gardens, and many-storied palaces of its beautiful capital, as truly as that thousands of men and women there are living real lives and fulfilling various destinies, so truly is there such a place as hell, all alive this hour with the multitudinous life of countless agonies and innumerable gradations of despair. Save the blessed in heaven, none live so keen or conscious a life as those millions of ruined souls. It is not impossible that we may go there oo. It is not impossible that we may

have sent some there already. When we pass along the streets, we must often see those who will dwell there for ever. There are some there now, who were not there an hour ago. There are some now in the green fields, or in the busy towns, on comfortable beds, or on the sunshiny seas, who in another hour perhaps will have gone there. This is a dreadfully real truth.

But what, if more than all this be true? What, if there was once a day when we should have gone thither if we had died? What, if this hour it holds mere boys and girls, who have sinned far less than we have done, nay, perhaps have sinned but once, while we have sinned a thousand times? Nay, we may humble ourselves still more. How long should we persevere in serving God, if we were certified there was no hell? Should we have left our sins, if it had not been for hell? What a thing it is to be upon this good earth, and surrounded by all this hopeful life, when we have actually by our own hand and eye, word and thought, and evil painstaking, worked out our right and title to all this everlasting woe. Just as the mist rises from the barren sea. where the corn grows not and the vines can bear no fruit, and forms the clouds which are to fall in fertilizing showers over hill and dale, so from those broad seas of fire and curse, the Divine Compassion rises like a cloud, to pour down streams of grace upon the souls of living men. Let no one ever turn away from the sight of hell, lest by little and by little and by very little, a good opinion of himself should grow up within his soul, and send him to that drear banishment at last. Indeed, it is good, very good, to think of hell, and of that kind wonder that we are not already there this hour. Nay, do not start, -what you see is indeed the white light of earth's sun; fear not; that sound, --it is the wind that waves the branches of the wood; be assured; your eyes do not deceive you, those are the village spires that are sleeping in the misty, quiet landscape; all is right so far. We are here, and we are free; but we ought to have been—there, and slaves!—"All for Jesus," 337, 338, 339, 340.

CCXIV

THE DOCTRINE OF EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT

WE are told to be chary in bringing hell forward, inasmuch as in these days it angers men rather than cows them, and is suggestive of temptations against the faith, and of irritabilities against God's dominion and sovereignty. But at this rate we may go on keeping back first one part of God's revelation, and then another. Each age has some portion of divine truth, of which it is specially impatient. God knew all this when He gave revelation to men. He does not bring forward a dispensation every century. He does not give each generation a bible of its own. He does not condescend so far to the noisy trivialities which strut across history, and call themselves the spirit of the age. Each century makes too much of itself, and is mistaken both in thinking itself so very peculiar, and in considering its peculiarities to be of much consequence. If men are rather irritated than frightened by the preaching of hell, it is certainly an index that the gift of faith is less abundant or less vigorous: but it is no argument against bringing forward a part of divine truth, which will find souls to save, even though others may rebel. Our Lord foresaw that His Gospel would be a stumbling-block, and St. Paul found that it looked like foolishness to many. As I said before, God knew all this, and yet revealed it; and in all the nineteen centuries of the Gospel there has never been one heretofore, whose spirituality was not fed from the contemplation of

the Four Last Things. As to these temptations against the faith, which, like exacting invalids, claim such a speciality of delicate forbearance, I get to respect them less the older I grow. They abound in unreality. They are the most unearnest of temptations. They are not unfrequently a form of conceit in the young, and a mode of self-importance in the middle-aged. I have so often been taken in by them, that I find it difficult to treat them as gravely as I wish to do, or to give a very careful attention to them; they mean so much less than they sound, and so much less than those who utter them imagine. I see a real, good, solid, wholesome work to be done in real, good, solid, wholesome souls, by frequent meditation on hell; and I cannot bring myself to sacrifice it to the sickly insincerities and dishonest ignorances, out of which so large a proportion of temptations against the faith arises.—"Spiritual Conferences," 357, 358.

CCXV

THE FEAR OF HELL

I no not think that if we kept in view the perfections of God, we should venture to believe, unless the Church taught us, that there was in creation such a place as hell. When it has been revealed to us we can perceive, not only its reasonableness, but also how admirably it is in keeping with the various attributes of God, and, not least of all, with the exquisiteness of His mercy. There is an awful beauty about that kingdom of eternal chastisement; there is a shadow east upon its fires, which we admire even while we tremble, the shadow of the gigantic proportions of a justice which is omnipotent; there is an austere grandeur about the equity of God's vindictive wrath, which makes us nestle closer to Him in love, even while we shudder at the vision. But to

us who live and strive, who have grace given us and yet have the power of resisting it, who have room for penance but are liable to relapse, who are right now but can at any time go wrong,—who can doubt that hell is a pure mercy, a thrilling admonition, a solemn passage in God's pathetic eloquence, pleading with us to save our souls and to go to Him in heaven? There is no class of Christians to whom hell is not an assistance. The conversion of a sinner is never complete without the fear of hell. Otherwise the work cannot be depended on. It has a flaw in its origin, a seed of decay in its very root. It is unstable and insecure. It is short-lived and unpersevering, like the seed in our Saviour's parable which fell upon a rock, sprang up for a season, and then withered away. Hell teaches us God, when we are too gross to learn Him otherwise. It lights up the depths of sin's malignity, that we may look down, and tremble, and grow wise. Its fires turn to water, and quench the fiery darts of the tempter. They rage around us, so that we dare not rise up from prayer. They follow us, like the many-tongued pursuing flames of a burning prairie, and drive us swiftly on, and out of breath, along the path of God's commandments. O Hell! thou desolate creation of eternal justice! who ever thought of finding a friend in thee ?

Even to those aiming at perfection the thought of hell is an immense assistance. The common things of the faith are in reality far above all the high lights of the saints. There is no growing out of or beyond the ordinary motives and old truths of the faith, even for those who are most highly advanced, or are practising the most disinterested love. There is no habitual state in which the spiritual life can rest and stay itself up in those thin atmospheres. Besides which, there can be no bounds safely set to the self-distrust which the greatest saints should have, and are the most likely

to have, of themselves. This being so, it is extremely desirable that even those who walk by love and are aiming at perfection should bring frequently before their minds the judgments of God in the terrific severities of hell. There are times when we faint and are inclined to relax our upward straining, our climbing of the steep mountain of God. Spiritual sweetness and periodical absences of temptation often unnerve us for fresh attacks of the Evil One. We come to do things in a slovenly and remiss way from long habit. While we grow in merits we are getting hugely into debt to the greatness and multitude of God's mercies, and this at times unsobers us. Moreover, sanctity cannot grow, unless there be also a growing appreciation of the possible extremities of God's justice. Neither is it an uncommon delusion to think that we are beyond the fears and impressions of the senses, though our softness in mortification ought to teach us better. Next to a very clear and penetrating contemplation of the attributes of God, nothing enables us to get a true hatred of sin more than the horrible nature of its eternal punishments. In all these conjunctures the frequent thought of hell is nothing less than an impulse heavenwards. The false delicacy of modern times in keep ing back the scaring images of hell, while in the case of children it has often marred a whole education, is a formidable danger to the sanctity as well as to the faith of men. -"The Creator and the Creature," 292-294.

CCXVI

THE LOSS OF GOD

THE whole beauty of Creation is in the presence of the Creator; the lives, the hopes, the joys, the possibilities of men exist simply in the benediction of His compassionate

presence. What would the world be but sheer hell, if it were reduced to the three bare necessities of His immensity, in essence, presence, and power? It will increase our reverence to think of this. We shall value every faintest token of God's dear presence more and more, when we see that the absence of it is no less a misery than hell. Yet how many men live without God in the world, and care not for it, and are happy, all because God is more gracious with them than they know of, and visits them with a sunny presence which they perceive not nor understand! So little is the pain of sense, intensely horrible as it may be, compared with the pain of loss, that hell may be shortly described as the one cavern of creation from which the inexorable majesty of God withdraws all presence, save and except the necessities of His immensity.

Let us put aside the curtain of vindictive fire, and see what this pain of loss is like; I say, what it is like, for it fortunately surpasses human imagination to conceive its dire reality. Suppose that we could see the huge planets and the ponderous stars whirling their terrific masses with awful, and if it might be so, clamorous velocity, and thundering through the fields of unresisting space with furious gigantic momentum, such as the mighty avalanche most feebly figures, and thus describing, with chafing eccentricities and frightful deflections, their mighty centre-seeking and centre-flying circles, we should behold in the nakedness of its tremendous operations the divine law of gravitation. Thus, in like manner, should we see the true relations between God and ourselves, the true meaning and worth of His beneficent presence, if we could behold a lost soul at the moment of its final and judicial reprobation, a few moments after its separation from the body and in all the strength of its disembodied vigour and the fierceness of its penal immortality.

No beast of the jungle, no chimera of heathen imagination, could be so appalling. No sooner is the impassable bar placed between God and itself, than what theologians call the creature's radical love of the Creator breaks out in a perfect tempest of undying efforts. It seeks its centre, and it cannot reach it. It bounds up towards God, and is dashed down again. It thrusts and beats against the granite walls of its prison with such incredible force, that the planet must be strong indeed whose equilibrium is not disturbed by the weight of that spiritual violence. Yet the great law of gravitation is stronger still, and the planet swings smoothly through its beautiful ether. Nothing can madden the reason of the disembodied soul, else the view of the desirableness of God and the inefficacious attractions of the glorious Divinity would do so.

Up and down its burning eage the many-facultied and mightily intelligenced spirit wastes its excruciating immortality in varying and ever varying still, always beginning and monotonously completing, like a caged beast upon its iron tether, a threefold movement, which is not three movements successively, but one triple movement all at once. In rage it would fain get at God to seize Him, dethrone Him, murder Him, and destroy Him; in agony it would fain suffocate its own interior thirst for God. which parches and burns it with all the frantic horrors of a perfectly self-possessed frenzy; and in fury it would fain break its tight fetters of gnawing fire which pin down its radical love of the beautiful Sovereign Good, and drag it ever back with cruel wrench from its desperate propension to its uncreated centre. In the mingling of these three efforts it lives its life of endless horrors. Portentous as is the vehemence with which it shoots forth its imprecations against God, they fall faint and harmless, far short of His tranquil, song-surrounded throne.

Four views of its own hideous state revolve around the lost soul, like the pictures of some ghastly show. One while it sees the million times ten million genera and species of pains of sense which meet and form a loathsome union with this vast central pain of loss. Another while all the multitude of graces, the countless kind providences, which it has wasted pass before it, and generate that undving worm of remorse of which our Saviour speaks. Then comes a keen but joyless view, a calculation, but only a bankrupt's calculation, of the possibility of gains for ever forfeited, of all the grandeur and ocean-like vastness of the bliss which it has lost. Last of all comes before it the immensity of God, to it so unconsoling and so unprofitable; it is not a picture, it is only a formless shadow, yet it knows instinctively that it is God. With a cry that should be heard creation through, it rushes upon Him, and it knocks itself, spirit as it is, against material terrors. It clasps the shadow of God, and lo! it embraces keen flames. It runs up to Him, but it has encountered only fearful demons. It leaps the length of its chain after Him, but it has only dashed into an affrighting crowd of lost and cursed souls. Thus is it ever writhing under the sense of being its own executioner. Thus there is not an hour of our summer sunshine, not a moment of our sweet starlight, not a vibration of our moonlit groves, not an undulation of odorous air from our flower-beds, not a pulse of delicious sound from music or song to us, but that hapless unpitiable soul is ever falling sick afresh of the overwhelming sense that all around it is eternal.-"The Blessed Sacrament," 372-375.

CCXVII

PURGATORY

LET us look at our lives; let us trace our hearts faithfully through but one day, and see of what mixed intentions, human respects, self-love, and pusillanimous temper our actions, nav even our devotions, are made up; and does not purgatory, heated sevenfold, and endured to the day of doom, seem but a gentle novitiate for the Vision of the All-holv?

But some persons turn in anger from the thought of purgatory, as if it were not to be endured that, after trying all our lives long to serve God, we should accomplish the tremendous feat of a good death, only to pass from the agonies of the death-bed into fire, long, keen, searching, triumphant, incomparable fire. Alas! my dear friends, your anger will not help you nor alter facts. But have you thought sufficiently about God? Have you tried to realise His holiness and purity in assiduous meditation? Is there a real divorce between you and the world, which you know is God's enemy? Do you take God's side? Have you wedded His interests? Do you long for His glory? Have you put sin alongside of our dear Saviour's Passion, and measured the one by the other? Surely, if you had, purgatory would but seem to you the last, unexpected, and inexpressibly tender invention of an obstinate love, which was mercifully determined to save you in spite of yourself. It would be a perpetual wonder to you, a joyous wonder, fresh every morning, a wonder that would be meat and drink to your soul, that you, being what you are, what you know yourself to be, what you may conceive God knows you to be, should be saved eter-

nally. Remember what the suffering soul said so simply, yet with such force, to Sister Francesca, "Ah! those on that side the grave little reckon how dearly they will pay on this side for the lives they live!" To be angry because you are told you will go to purgatory! Silly, silly people! most likely it is a great false flattery, and that you will never be good enough to go there at all. Why, positively, you do not recognize your own good fortune, when you are told of it. And none but the humble go there. I remember Maria Crocifissa was told, that although many of the saints while on earth loved God more than some do even in heaven, yet that the greatest saint on earth was not so humble as are the souls in purgatory. I do not think I ever read anything in the Lives of the Saints which struck me so much as that. You see it is not well to be angry; for those only are lucky enough to get into purgatory, who sincerely believe themselves to be worthy of hell.—"All for Jesus," 366, 367.

CCXVIII

A CUP OF COLD WATER

Among the sorrows of kind hearts there is one which seems as if it grew greater in each succeeding generation of the world. It is the enormous growth of poverty and wretchedness, and our own inability to relieve it. There is hardly one among us who has not felt this. So overwhelming is the misery, that those who have little to give, feel the pain as much as those who have nothing, and those who have much to give almost more. For, giving opens a man's heart, and makes him love to give, and those who have more to give know best how little it is, compared with the

necessity. Yet, this yearning to give alms comes from the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and it must be satisfied; and how-can we better satisfy it than by giving alms to those who need it most, the Holy Souls in purgatory? We can all do this; and how much might we do, even for our dear poor on earth, if we commended their cause to the souls whom God allows us to liberate, and made a sweet bargain with them that, when once in the free air of heaven, their first homage and salutation over, they should pray for an abundant outpouring of grace upon rich men, that their hearts might be opened like the hearts of the first Christians, to deny themselves, and to feast the poor of Christ?—"All for Jesus," 387, 388.

CCXIX

DEVOTION TO THE HOLY SOULS

This devotion for the dead does not rest in words and feelings, nor does it merely lead to action indirectly and at last. It is action in itself, and thus it is a substantial devotion. It speaks and a deed is done; it loves and a pain is lessened; it sacrifices and a soul is delivered. Nothing can be more solid. We might almost dare to compare it, in its pure measure, to the efficacious voice of God, which works what it says, and effects what it utters and wills, and a creation comes. The royal devotion of the Church is the works of mercy; and see how they are all satisfied in this devotion for the dead! It feeds the hungry souls with Jesus, the Bread of Angels. It gives them to drink in their incomparable thirst His Precious Blood. It clothes the naked with a robe of glory. It visits the sick with mighty powers to heal, and at the least

consoles them by the visit. It frees the captives with a heavenly and eternal freedom, from a bondage dreader far than death. It takes in the strangers, and heaven is the hospice into which it receives them. It buries the dead in the bosom of Jesus in everlasting rest. When the last doom shall come, and our dearest Lord shall ask those seven questions of His judicial process, those interrogatories of the works of mercy, how happy will that man be-and it may be the poorest beggar amongst us who never gave an alms because he has had to live on alms himself-who shall hear his own defence sweetly and eloquently taken up by crowds of blessed souls, to whom he has done all these things while they waited in their prison-house of hope! Three times a day St. Francis of Sales put himself in the presence of God as before his judge, and tried to judge himself in his Saviour's way. Let us but do that, and we shall become so many servitors of Michael, so many guardian angels of that beautiful but melancholy land of suffering and expectant souls.—"All for Jesus," 373, 374.

CCXX

"YET SO AS BY FIRE"

Purgatory goes as near to the unriddling the riddle of the world, as any one ordinance of God which can be named. Difficulties are perpetually drifting that way to find their explanation; and the saints of God have turned so full a light upon those fields of fire, that the geography of them seems almost as familiar to us as the well-known features of the surface of the earth. The charitable practices of Catholic devotion lead us to spend so much of our day amid the patience of that beautiful suffering, that it has become

to us like the wards of a favourite hospital, with its familiar faces brightening at the welcome words of consolation. It is the same fire as hell. That in itself is a terrible reflec-The revelations of the saints depict the tortures of it as fearful in the extreme. There is a consent of them, as to the immense length of time which souls average under that punishment, a consent fully bearing out the practice of the Church in anniversaries and foundations for Masses for ever. The very slightest infidelities to grace seem to be visited there with the acutest sufferings. God Himself has bidden His saints to honour with chaste fear and exceeding awe the rigours of His justice, and the requirements of His purity, in that land of bitter long delay. Now, does it come natural to us to look at all this system, this terrible eighth sacrament of fire, which is the home of those souls whom the seven real sacraments of earth have not been allowed to purify completely—does it come natural to us to look at it all as simply a penal machinery invented for the saints and those most like the saints, to cut away with its vindictive sharpness the little imperfections which come of human frailty? That it should fulfil this office is most intelligible, most accordant with God's perfections, and most consolatory to souls themselves. But does not the view at once recommend itself to us, that it was an invention of God to multiply the fruit of our Saviour's Passion, that it was intended for the great multitudes who should die in charity with God, but in imperfect charity, and therefore that it is as it were the continuance of deathbed mercies beyond the grave, and that, as such, it throws no uncertain light on the cheering supposition that most Catholics are saved, especially of the poor who sorrow and suffer here ?- "The Creator and the Creature," 333, 334.

CCXXI

THE KINGDOM OF GLORY

How shall we hope to measure the kingdom of glory, when it is to be measured only by the Divine Magnificence? Both a prophet and an apostle join in teaching us that eve has not seen, nor ear heard, nor man's heart conceived, what God has prepared for them that love Him. When the bodies of the just rise at the general resurrection, with their senses spiritualized and rendered capable of pleasures which do not fall within their province now, and with perhaps many new senses developed in the immortal body which were unknown in its mortal days, the pure pleasures of these glorified senses must be something quite beyond the power of our imagination to picture to itself. He who knows the blameless exultation of his soul when the eye has conveyed to it a landscape of surpassing beauty, or whose ear has thrilled with some inspiriting or subduing strain of music, or who, when he heard a passage of magnificent poetry, felt as if an immediate and extraordinary accession of bold intellectual power was given to him as he listened, may at least indistinctly guess the exquisite delights of the glorified senses of the risen body, or which is perhaps more true, understand how their delicacy and charm must be beyond our power of guessing.

Yet the heavenly joys of the illuminated understanding far transcend the thrills of the glorified senses. The contemplation of heavenly beauty and of heavenly truth must indeed be beyond all our earthly standards of comparison. The clearness and instantaneousness of all the mental processes, the complete exclusion of error, the unbroken serenity of the vision, the facility of embracing whole worlds and systems in one calm, searching, exhausting glance, the

divine character and utter holiness of all the truths presented to the view,—these are broken words which serve at least to show what we may even now indistinctly covet in that bright abode of everlasting bliss. Intelligent intercourse with the angelic choirs, and the incessant transmission of the divine splendours through them to our minds, cannot be thought of without our perceiving that the keen pleasures and deep sensibilities of the intellectual world on earth are but poor, thin, unsubstantial shadows of the exulting immortal life of our glorified minds above.

The very expansion of the faculties of the soul, and the probable disclosure in it of many new faculties which have no object of exercise in this land of exile, are in themselves pleasures which we can hardly picture to ourselves. To be rescued from all narrowness, and for ever; to possess at all times a perfect consciousness of our whole undying selves, and to possess and retain that self-consciousness in the bright light of God; to feel the supernatural corroborations of the light of glory, securing to us powers of contemplation such as the highest mystical theology can only faintly and feebly imitate; to expatiate in God, delivered from the monotony of human things; to be securely poised in the highest flights of our immense capacities, without any sense of weariness, or any chance of a reaction; who can think out for himself the realities of a life like this?

Yet what is all this compared with one hour, one of earth's short hours, of the magnificences of celestial love? Oh! to turn our whole souls upon God, and souls thus expanded and thus glorified; to have our affections multiplied and magnified a thousandfold, and then girded up and strengthened by immortality to bear the beauty of God to be unveiled before us; and even so strengthened, to be rapt by it into a sublime amazement which has no similitude on earth; to be carried away by the inebriating torrents of love, and yet be

firm in the most steadfast adoration; to have passionate desire, yet without tumult or disturbance; to have the most bewildering intensity along with an unearthly calmness; to lose ourselves in God, and then find ourselves there more our own than ever; to love rapturously and to be loved again still more rapturously, and then for our love to grow more rapturous still, and again the return of our love to be still outstripping what we gave, and then for us to love even yet more and more rapturously, and again, and again, and again to have it so returned, and still the great waters of God's love to flow over us and overwhelm us until the vehemence of our impassioned peace and the daring vigour of our yearning adoration reach beyond the sight of our most venturous imagining; -what is all this but for our souls to live a life of the most intelligent entrancing ecstasy, and yet not to be shivered by the fiery heat? There have been times on earth when we have caught our own hearts loving God, and there was a flash of light, and then a tear, and after that we lay down to rest. Oh, happy that we were! Worlds could not purchase from us even the memory of those moments. And yet when we think of heaven, we may own that we know not yet what manner of thing it is to love the Lord our God.

Meanwhile it is difficult to conceive how the pure pleasures of the glorified senses, or the delights of our illuminated understandings, or the expansion of our souls dilated with immortality, or the magnificences of celestial love, can be of any price at all in our eyes, seeing that they are but the outside fringes of heaven, the merest accessories of our true beatitude. To see God face to face, as He is; to gaze undazzled on the Three Divine Persons, cognizable and distinct in the burning fires of their inaccessible splendours; to behold that long-coveted sight, the endless Generation of the All-holy Son, and our hearts to hold the joy, and not

die; to watch with spirits all outstretched in adoration the ever-radiant and ineffably beautiful Procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son, and to participate ourselves in that jubilee of jubilees, and drink in with greedy minds the wonders of that Procession, and the marvellous distinctness of its beauty from the Generation of the Son; to feel ourselves with ecstatic awe and yet with seraphic intimacy overshadowed by the Person of the Unbegotten Father, the Father to whom and of whom we have said so much on earth, the Fountain of the Godhead, who is truly our Father while He is also the Father of the eternal Son; to explore, with exulting licence and with unutterable glad fear, Attribute after Attribute, oceans opening into oceans of divinest beauty; to lie astonished in unspeakable contentment before the vision of God's surpassing Unity, so long the joyous mystery of our predilection, while the Vision through all eternity seems to grow more fresh and bright and new: -O my poor soul! what canst thou know of this, or of these beautiful necessities of thy exceeding love, which shall only satisfy itself in endless alternations, now of silence and now of song ?--" The Creator and the Creature," 247-250.

CCXXII

THE LAND OF LOVE

The sweetest of all earthly joys is love: and the life in heaven is a life of love. Love, more than any human passion, has controlled the destinies of the world. It has been historically the greatest natural motive-power on earth. Nay, what of natural brightness each life of man on earth possesses,—whence comes it, if not from love? What should we be at this moment, if we had none to love? How

all our light would become darkness for a while, until our eyes could bear the light of God? Not to have God to love—is hell. Yet the love of all passionate lovers upon earth, thrown together, could not equal the love of the lowest and the calmest soul in heaven. Eternity will give us new powers of loving. We shall love with some great nameless love, of which parental, filial, conjugal, fraternal loves only represent some portions or some elements. The jubilee of this immense power of loving is inconceivable. The objects of our love will be multiplied ten thousandfold; and yet the very multiplication of its objects will only quicken the intensity of the love. Then consider, that the whole of this ocean of affection will always be poured out gloriously in the immortal vehemence of a spotless love, unutterably blissful because unutterably holy.

If we were bidden to say which were the greater joy,—to love or to be loved,—it would be hard to give a judgment. We all crave for love. Our whole nature expands under its influence. It gives us new characters. It converts the deepest misery into happiness, and it makes heroes out of cowards. So far as our pleasure is concerned, there seem to be no limits to our capabilities of receiving love. What an amount of it we can drink in, even now and here, while our souls are undeveloped, and our lives narrow, and our hearts shallow, compared with what they will be! Surely, then, in heaven we shall be able to absorb oceans of love: and as surely there will be oceans to absorb. Each one of the blessed will love us with a might of love far beyond all earthly love; and the blessed are innumerable. The wide strong fiery natures of the angels will be poured out upon us in love, a love which we cannot now define, but a love more deep, more beautiful, and more possessing than human love; and of these angels there are legions upon legions. Who can think of the bliss of that love with which the

sinless Mother of God will endow us? No fond earthly mother, rapt in the exclusiveness of an excessive love, ever hung over her first-born and her only-born with a fondness like to that, which the Mother of Jesus will testify to each of the redeemed. Shall I dare to speak of the Sacred Humanity, or of how we shall share in the love which Peter once enjoyed upon the shores of Gennesareth, or John when he leaned upon the Bosom in which the Sacred Heart was beating? We have no measures for a bliss like that. Yet all this put together, saints, angels, Mary, Human Heart of Jesus.—it is not such a love as the one which still awaits us. Glorified though we shall be, we shall still be little, finite, weak: and yet out of every perfection of the immense, omnipotent, all-knowing, all-holy, incomprehensible, jubilant God there will flow into us torrents of bewildering love in perpetual inundations, overpowering us with thrills of a vast new life, taking away our breath, and suspending all the faculties of our souls far, far up amid unthought-of regions of light, in ecstasies of an incomparable beatitude, like to the beatitude of God Himself. We shall be eternally swallowed up in eternal love .- "Spiritual Conferences." 363-365.

CCXXIII

GOD'S TRIUMPH IN THE SAVED

How does the Creator, the King of kings, receive His tribute? He bursts forth all divinely into triumph, because a half-converted sinner has condescended to accept His grace. He bids the angels rejoice, and holds high feast through all the empyrean heaven, not because He has evolved some new and wonder-stirring system out of nothing, not because He has called into being some million-worlded

nebula, and cast upon it such an effulgence of His beauty as throws all the rest of His creation into the shade .- but because one wretched, unworthy, offensive man has, after an immense amount of divine eloquence and pleading, consented to take the first step towards not being damned. because one outcast of human society, who has drunk his fill of every vice, has graciously condescended for fear of hell to accept heaven! These are the Creator's triumphs, these the ovations of everlasting and of all-wise mercy. And God can do nought unworthy of Himself. He cannot demean Himself. Abasement is impossible to Him. Nothing can sully His incomparable purity. Nothing can He do which is not infinitely worthy of Him, worthy of His power, His wisdom, and His goodness. And therefore this triumph, this feast of angels, over one sinner that does penance, is altogether worthy of the adorable majesty of the eternally blessed God! Oh! who would not weep over the wonders of creative love, mystery after mystery, at every turn giving out fresh treasures of tenderness, compassion, and magnificence?

Watch that soul which is now just entering heaven. Can anything be more amazing than the caresses which God is lavishing upon it? Heaven itself has almost grown brighter by its entrance, and the anthems of the redeemed have sounded forth with a more full sonorous melody. Mary on her throne has been filled with joy, while an exulting thrill of sympathy ran through all the angelic multitudes. And why do they rejoice? Because there is a new joy for God, another glory for His complacency to rest on. It is the salvation of that soul which has just entered heaven. Some fifty years of the full use of reason it lived on earth. The world was its delight, wealth almost its idol. It drank its full of various pleasures, and thought not of His goodness out of which they come. Many times the divine law came

across that man's path, and when it did, he straightway, and with little reflection, transgressed it. He loved luxury, denied himself nothing, and was not over-bountiful to the poor. He was surrounded by comforts, as a city is compassed by its walls. He had sorrows and troubles—who has not? But they were light and infrequent. The world smiled upon its votary. He was popular with his fellows. He had all that his indolent ambition cared to have; and, best of all, he was blessed with almost unbroken health There was at last almost the weariness of satiety about his undeviatingly prosperous fortune. Disease came, and his old joys ceased to be joys at all. He had nothing then to tempt him from God, but everything to draw him nearer to Him. Fear also, with the belief of hell, wrought strongly upon him; and by the help of priest and sacrament, together with the grace of a sorrow easily within reach of his faith and fear, he put together in some ten days the dregs of half a century spent in the service of the devil and the world; and he has now gone through a very circuitous path in purgatory to heaven, to offer God this refuse of his probation.

And heaven keeps feast for this! And the great Creator takes almost with avidity the leavings of the world, counting for chivalry the querulous helplessness of a sin-enfeebled soul. There is not one word of reproach, one look of discontent. Coupled with His extraordinary mindfulness of minutest services, God is seemingly forgetful how all good is but His own grace. Moreover He is as it were blind to the fact that the man was after all doing what was best for himself, and when he could hardly help himself, and even then with amazingly little of self-indignation or of righteous zeal. See! His arms are round that deathbed penitent. He is telling him the secrets of His love. He is sealing for him with a Father's kiss the eternity of his beatitude. That

man will lie for ever bathed in the beautiful light of the Godhead!

Is this credible? Should we dare to believe it, if it were not of faith? O wonderful, wonderful God! of whom each hour is telling us something new, making premature perpetual heaven in our hearts! It is an old history, that love makes the Creator seem to put Himself below His own creatures: it is an old history, yet it surprises us almost to tears each morning as we wake. So here we come to a Servant-God, like the Incarnate Servant-Saviour, Jesus Christ. And yet there are men to whom God is a difficulty! There are men who think hard thoughts of Him, whose only trial of us is in the prodigious excesses of His love, which wearies and outstrips at times the slowness of our faith. O Heavenly Father! it is the greatness of Thy goodness which bewilders our humility by mocking our knowledge of ourselves; and that is the only difficulty we find in Thee. May it grow still more difficult, still more beyond our grasp, for therein is our eternal life!

What, then, is the conclusion to which we come about this repaying of our love by God? It is simply this. In the first place, He has made His glory coincide with our interests. Secondly, from a privilege He lowers love into a precept, and this one act is a complete revelation of Himself. Thirdly, He so puts our interests into His, that it is hard to look at His interests only, without falling into heresy. Do these conclusions solve the five questions we have been asking? No! but they lead to the one answer of all the five; only that, ending as we began, the answer is itself a mystery. St. John states it; no one can explain it; earth would be hell without it; purgatory is paradise because of it; we shall live upon it in heaven, yet never learn all that is in it;—God is love!—"The Creator and the Creature," 254-258.

CCXXIV

HOME AT LAST

A CHILD'S first sight of the ocean is an era in his life. It is a new world without him, and it awakens a new world within him. There is no other novelty to be compared with it, and after-life will bring nothing at all like it. A rapid multitude of questions rush upon the mind; yet the child is silent, as if he needed not an answer to any of them. They are beyond answering; and he feels that the sight itself satisfies him better than any answer. Those great bright outspread waters! the idea of God is the only echo to them in his mind: and now henceforth he is a different child because he has seen the sea.

So is it with us when we sit by the ocean of creative love. Questions throng upon us; problems start up on all sides; mysteries intersect each other. Yet so long as we are children, are childlike in heart and spirit, the questions are not difficulties. Either they answer themselves, or they do not need an answer, like questions which are exclamations only, or we would rather not have an answer, lest peradventure some high thing should be lowered or some holy thing be made common. To gaze—to gaze is all we desire. The fact, that so much is mystery to us, is no trouble. It is love. That is enough. We trust it. We would almost rather it was not made plainer. It might be darker if it were Whereas now, though it is indistinct, it is tranquillizing also, like the beauty of a summer night. We have thoughts which cannot be put into words, but it seems to us as if they more than answered all difficulties. How the broad waters flow and shine, and how the many-headed waves leap up to the sun and sparkle, and then sink down into the depths again, yet not to rest; and placid as the azure expanse appears, how evermore it thunders on the hard white sand, and fringes the coast with a bewitching silver mist! Why should we ever stir from where we are? To look on the sea seems better than to learn the science of its storms, the grandeur of its steadfastness, or the many moods of its beautiful mutabilities. The heathen called the sea-spirit father. There was much in the thought.

But when we cease to be children and to be childlike, there is no more this simple enjoyment. We ask questions, not because we doubt, but because when love is not all in all to us, we must have knowledge, or we chafe and pine. Then a cloud comes between the sun and the sea, and that expanse of love, which was an undefined beauty, a confused magnificence, now becomes black and ruffled, and breaks up into dark wheeling currents of predestination, or mountainous waves of divine anger and judicial vengeance, and the white surf tells us of many a sunken reef, where we had seen nothing but a smooth and glossy azure plain, rocking gently to and fro, as unruffled as a silken banner.

We shall be children once again, and on the same shore, and we shall then never leave it more, and we shall see down into the crystal depths of this creative love, and its wide waters will be the breadth and measure of our joy, and its glancing splendour will be the light of our eternal life, and its soft thunder will be the endless, solemn, thrilling music of our beatitude.—" The Creator and the Creature," 103-105.

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